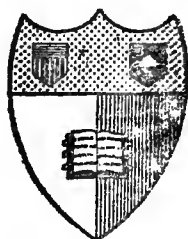


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WARD MUIR



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FURTHER EAST THAN ASIA

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“FURTHER EAST THAN ASIA”

A ROMANTIC ADVENTURE

BY

WARD MUIR

“More East, more East than Asia
There blows a perfumed breeze
Where giants rent a continent
And flung it on the seas—
Here, beyond furthest Asia,
From pain we were released ;
Elysian Field where ills are healed—
Its glamour and its sloth concealed
The Sorrows of the East !”

From the Poems of

ALVIN DALROY KELLOCK.

LONDON : SIMPKIN, MARSHALL,
HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LTD.

1919

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FURTHER EAST THAN ASIA

CHAPTER I

WHAT LIES WITHIN THE JUNGLE?

BALANCING himself against the rail of the poop, yet within the shadow of the awning, the young man in the white duck suit and the solah topee helmet was inscribing—the word “inscribing” suited the quaint fastidiousness with which he wielded his pencil—a sentence upon a rather dog-eared scribbling-tablet.

“This is to certify” (he wrote) “that Captain Sibthorpe, of the steamship *Orpheus*, has conveyed me to the island of Pulo. I have taken observations, and, comparing my results with the chart, I am satisfied that the land now on our port bow is the said island. It is agreed that I shall here quit the *Orpheus*, but that I shall be called for again in one week from to-day. Should I not keep this appointment, the failure

will be mine, and Captain Sibthorpe is at liberty to leave me, without further inquiry, and to deliver this paper, as a proof of good faith, to Dr. Levaloir.

“(Signed) ALVIN D. KELLOCK,
“ American Citizen.”

This singular document, pencilled in a script which was both legible and minutely dainty, was then torn from its pad, and presented by its writer to the gentleman designated as Captain Sibthorpe.

What ironic fate had decreed that Captain Sibthorpe, a cockney born in London's most unromantic and respectable suburb—to wit, Balham—should spend his life as master of a tramp steamer cruising for recondite profits in the Eastern Archipelago, it was impossible to divine. As he squatted, now, upon a decrepit deck-chair, and puffed at a highly-flavoured manilla cheroot, he presented an unattractive figure. Obese, perspiring profusely, attired in soiled pyjamas, and with a stubble of beard sprouting upon his many chins, he looked the last man in the universe either to take charge of a valuable steamship or to be entrusted with a mission which demanded the exercise of honour and secrecy.

Captain Sibthorpe, nevertheless—and Kellock, in their voyage together, had soon discovered this—was an expert at his business. He was neither fool nor knave; and what he did not know about the Archipelago, from the Malacca Straits to Timor, was not worth knowing.

The Captain, accepting Kellock's slip of paper, bent over it and frowned. As he himself would have said, he was "no scholar," and it was his habit always to frown when he read.

"Ah!" he said. The cheroot dangled from his lips, but he did not remove it when he spoke. "Ah! American citizen, eh? Of course I spotted that, Mr. Kellock. Still, now you've put it in black and white——"

He paused.

"These here American Consuls," he resumed, "they're so—what d'ye call it?—so many of them everywhere——"

"Ubiquitous," Kellock suggested.

"That's it. Ubiquitous." Captain Sibthorpe grinned. "They're so ubiquitous, out here in the East—everywhere—Borneo—Sumatra—Java—the Celebes—can't go anywhere but you find there's a Yank on the lookout for Yanks. Begging your pardon, Mr. Kellock!" The Captain made a gesture of apology. "Yanks

we call them, you understand: all Americans, you know; but I'm told Yankee isn't correct."

"No matter," smiled Kellock.

"So I was thinking"—Captain Sibthorpe's mental processes seemed at last to be bringing him to the point—"that there might be some awkward questions from one of these here Consuls if you was to disappear."

"But I don't intend to disappear." Kellock, with an agile movement, hitched himself up on to the rail, and sat there, swinging his long legs. "My friend, I would have you know that your alarms are groundless. For three reasons." He ticked them off upon his fingers—the thin, sensitive fingers of a poet. "Item one: I am thirty years of age and intend to see a great deal more of this beautiful world before I—as you politely put it—'disappear.' Item two: I have given my promise to Dr. Levaloir to return. Item the third: Suppose for some reason I *do* disappear (this proviso is purely for your benefit, Captain, for I *shan't* disappear), there isn't a soul will miss me."

"If you was British," returned Captain Sibthorpe, unconsciously casting a reflection on the international vigilance of his nation's authorities, "I'd believe you. Nobody cares a curse about the God-forsaken sort of Britisher

who drifts about this part of the ocean. They've no reason to be here, and the sooner they vanish the better. But with Americans it's different. An American always has a reason for being anywhere."

The Captain threw off this aphorism with an air of morbid wisdom. "And the reason," he said, "is generally oof."

" 'Oof' ?"

"Money," explained the Captain. "They're after money. Schemes. Trade. Tin-mine prospecting, or rubber, or areca-nuts, or some such speculation. They're at the end of a string, and t'other end of the string is in an office in Singapore, or even San Francisco. No 'disappearing' for them—not without the string getting jiggled and the Consuls asking nasty questions, and maybe a warship coming poking around. That's what *money* does."

"True," assented Kellock. "You're a philosopher, Captain. Yes, that's what money does." His clean-cut lips curved into a faint grimace. "I speak from experience. It may amuse you to learn that I once owned quite a pile of money. When I was a youth, in New York, I was what is called a millionaire."

"You don't say!"

"And I was a slave," pursued Kellock.

"Until, all of a sudden, I gained my freedom. There was what newspaper headlines call 'A Crash.' I woke up to find myself without a cent—but with a soul."

Captain Sibthorpe expelled a stream of cigar smoke from his nose. "There's some," he opined, "who'd rather have the cents than the soul."

Kellock laughed. "I guess you're thinking I'm a prig. Maybe I am. But not about money. I tell you, my life began when I lost that million. I've never wanted for food—I learnt that any man, in any place, can earn his food. And I'm happy, just in wandering and in working and in enjoying freedom. No, I'm not out for money, Captain; you must try and credit me on that score."

"Then why this voyage?"

"Simply because the job came my way. I let things happen. I go anywhere that seems interesting."

"Not even armed." The Captain was still unsatisfied. "I've a revolver I could lend you, to go ashore with——"

Kellock shook his head. "I'm not afraid."

"Then you ought to be."

"But *why*?"

Captain Sibthorpe was silent. Presently, with a grunt, he upheaved himself from his

chair and came to the rail and stood beside Kellock. There he stationed himself, staring, with a critical and disgusted expression, at the line of land which lay at a distance of a mile or less from the motionless *Orpheus*.

The sea was calm, glassily calm, and the master of the *Orpheus* had not seen fit to cast anchor. The ancient tramp steamer, her sides faintly steaming with the moisture and the heat, was as still as though she were some uncouth rock rising above the surface of a lake. An uncanny hush reigned on board, after the ceaseless thump and throb of the engines, which ("like a kind of prolonged artificial headache," as Kellock described it) had vibrated unflaggingly ever since the *Orpheus* had sailed from Gah-nung. Engineers and crew, even the mate upon the bridge, appeared to be asleep.

Asleep, too, seemed the land at which Kellock now turned to gaze with the Captain—asleep or lifeless. As far as eye could reach there was no sign of human habitation. Down to the brink of the sea came the jungle—that typical, hopeless jungle of the Archipelago, a mass of vegetation so tight-packed, so tortured and struggling and obscenely luxuriant, that the brain is staggered at the thought of ever planning to clear it and make a foothold for

civilization to plant its outposts. Only at one point was there a tiny fissure, a mere nick, in this solid cliff of greenery; and this, as Kellock knew, marked the entrance to the river. Inland there were hills; but even the hills were covered with forest. Neither upon those hills, nor at the river's mouth, was there a vestige of a dwelling, not even smoke rising into the air.

"What I want to know is—why ain't there no settlement on this here island of Pulo?" The Captain, his cheroot dangling once more, voiced the conundrum which was in Kellock's mind. "Here it is, large as life, marked on the maps—though not a trace of detail in the interior, mind you: there's been no survey, that's plain; you *can't* survey jungle, anyhow: half Malaysia isn't surveyed to this day, and folks at home talk of there being no place left to explore!—here it is, this Pulo, with no settlement, no trade, no exports, no imports, nobody in charge, as you might say. The Dutch own this bit of the Archipelago; but did you ever see a Dutch gunboat stop at Pulo? Not on your life, Mr. Kellock. And I'll tell you why."

The Captain, suddenly removing his cigar from between his lips, expectorated over the side of the *Orpheus*.

"I don't like the smell," he announced irrelevantly.

"Better light another," said Kellock.

"I wasn't meaning the smell of this here cheroot," the Captain answered. He sniffed noisily. "Don't you smell a smell in the air, Mr. Kellock? Sickly-like? It's the smell of Pulo. This ain't my first visit, and I've always noticed it: you strike chunks of the smell as soon as you're straight opposite the river."

Kellock sniffed. The Captain's cheroot, and the multitudinous oily odours of the *Orpheus*, rendered it difficult to disentangle any very positive olfactory sensation; but—yes—now that he sought for it he found that he *did* detect a remote, subtle and sweet perfume, like that of violets, exhaled, apparently, from the sea.

"Probably some strongly-scented creepers in the jungle," he suggested. "There must be a breeze bringing it from the shore."

"No breeze, sir, not a breath. That ain't flowers of any sort, that stink. It comes from the river water. I don't like it, anyhow; it's not healthy." The Captain spat again, and resumed his cigar.

"I find it rather pleasant than otherwise," averred Kellock. "But you were saying that

the Dutch never stop at Pulo, and you were going to tell me why not."

Captain Sibthorpe turned and scrutinised his passenger.

"*Because they're afraid,*" he announced, bluntly.

"Afraid of what?"

"Dunno. They're just afraid, that's all. There's stories and legends about Pulo—silly nonsense, as like as not—but anyway it hasn't a nice name, not amongst them as know these seas. Not a nice name, Pulo hasn't."

"You are cryptic," smiled Kellock; but as the adjective was evidently lost on his companion he went on: "You say you've been here before, Captain. Now tell me, as friend to friend, what's *wrong* with Pulo?"

"As friend to friend, Mr. Kellock—and thank you, sir, for the compliment—I tell you candidly, I don't know. There's something wrong with Pulo, all the same. I'm an older man than you, and I'm more familiar with these seas than you, and I advise you not to go ashore on Pulo. There's something wrong there. I admit I don't know what it is——"

"Probably malaria," interjected Kellock.

"No, sir, it is not malaria—though there may be malaria. When the boat comes off

from the shore to fetch you, you'll agree that its crew are the healthiest brand of niggers you've ever seen. It's notorious: the few people who have met any of the natives of Pulo are unanimous in their testimony—they're unlike any Malaysians, any Dyaks, any natives of the Archipelago; the Pulo niggers are live wires. . . . And yet they don't do no trade, you never catch them off the coast fishing; they live entirely inland and have no truck with the outer world."

"And the outer world, you tell me, has no truck with *them*. It's certainly queer," Kellock mused.

"There's many queer mysteries in the Archipelago," said Captain Sibthorpe. "This is the queerest end of Asia. Of the East, I mean," he corrected himself. "The Archipelago, if you take me, Mr. Kellock, is more East than Asia."

"'More East than Asia': that's a good phrase. You're a poet, Captain Sibthorpe. I'll steal 'more East than Asia' for one of my own verses, some day. Still . . . to return to our discussion. You advise me not to go ashore, when—as we anticipate—a boat comes off to fetch me. I gather that you have previously brought passengers here, who have been met by

the boatload of healthy 'niggers' (as you name them, ethnologically incorrectly, if I may say so), and the said passengers *have* gone ashore. Well, were they any the worse of their hardihood?"

"I won't say as how they was any the worse," ventured Captain Sibthorpe, cautiously—"because I never set eyes on one of them again. In short, Mr. Kellock, *they never came back*. And that, sir, is one of the things that's wrong with Pulo. The chaps as go ashore *never come back*."

Kellock's eyebrows rose. "Now we're getting to the point at last, Captain. Briefly, you hold that when Dr. Levaloir asked me to go to Pulo and fetch a certain object for him, he was asking me to do the impossible."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that, sir." The Captain was perturbed. "To tell you the truth, I never meant to let on to you that I'd been here before. Dr. Levaloir pays well. (And *I'm* not indifferent to money, as you say you are, Mr. Kellock.) He's paid me well every time I brought a passenger for him to Pulo, and he's paid me well for you. But mark this. In each case the bargain was that when I brought the passenger back I'd get double the pay. If I bring *you* back I'm to get double the

pay. Only—in previous cases, no return passenger ever turned up.”

Kellock considered. “How many times have you brought a passenger to Pulo?”

“Seven times. And every time it was fixed in such a way that we arrived here at the full moon. Evidently Dr. Levaloir has some arrangement with the Sultan of Pulo (one of my passengers told me that it was the Sultan of Pulo he was sent to see)——”

“Yes. I too was given to understand that my errand was to the Sultan,” put in Kellock.

“That the Sultan was to send a boat downstream at each full moon on the off-chance of finding a passenger from Dr. Levaloir. Five Englishmen, one Swede, and one Canadian I’ve brought here for the doctor. And he paid me well to bring them: the old *Orpheus* earns good money with such passengers. But never once have I been able to claim the double pay by taking the passenger on the return journey.”

“You seem quite certain that Dr. Levaloir would have paid you—genuinely *meant*, I mean, that his messenger should return.”

“Quite certain.” Captain Sibthorpe was positive. “Dr. Levaloir may not be pretty to look at, but he’s straight. That’s another thing I know by my experience of the East.

Dr. Levaloir, sir, is—what d'ye call it?—*revered* by all the Archipelago, nay, from Formosa to the Andamans. Just as I look askance at Pulo because of its reputation—without knowing why—so I respect Dr. Levaloir for *his* reputation, without knowing why. They call him the Healer of Sorrows. Everywhere, in the Archipelago, even in India, and Siam, and Japan, there's a kind of hushed whisper of awe at the miracles of the Healer of Sorrows. That's Dr. Levaloir."

Kellock nodded. "You're right. That's precisely why, having given him my word, I say to you, Captain, that—well, you'll earn the double pay by taking me on the return journey."

"I should mention," said the Captain, "that there *have* been return passengers. Dr. Levaloir doesn't always charter the *Orpheus*, you see, sir. My old chum Carnegie, of the *Pearl*, took a passenger to Pulo for the doctor no less than three times, to *and* from. He was a Yank—I mean an American—this passenger of Carnegie's; a grand, upstanding fellow, Carnegie said, clean and wholesome like yourself, Mr. Kellock. His name was Van Duysen. But the fourth voyage that Carnegie took him to Pulo, this Van Duysen never reappeared. Gone. Never a word. Carnegie was annoyed at having to

go back to Gah-nung without his passenger, and not to get the double pay, as per contract; but he said his annoyance was nothing to the doctor's. When Carnegie went up to Dr. Levaloir's place and told him Van Duysen had failed for the usual appointment and was lost, the doctor (he said) absolutely wrung his hands with grief. 'My God!' he kept exclaiming, 'my God! Another fine lad fallen! That accursed temptation!' And then he kept muttering some stuff—Carnegie didn't rightly understand it—about 'Lotus land,' and something about a lost 'elixir,' whatever that may be."

Kellock knitted his brows as he listened to the Captain. "You interest me extraordinarily. I'm as much in the dark as you are. There's some stuff, I don't know what, that I'm to fetch back from the Sultan of Pulo to the doctor. I was assured that it was something beneficial to those hordes of poor sick wretches whom Dr. Levaloir is healing. That was good enough for me. I said I'd fetch it. And I'm going to fetch it."

The two men were silent for a space. Their shadows had lengthened, and were now visible upon the unwrinkled surface of the pavement of the sea, rising above the massive shadow of

the hull of the *Orpheus*, between it and the narrower shadow of the awning above their heads. The sun was sinking and its level rays had penetrated beneath the awning. Its flat, reddish illumination fell, too, upon the forests of the island, tinging their dank foliage with a hue as of a delicate lacquering of gold.

"Sun'll be gone in half an hour," observed the Captain. "The Sultan's boat will be here by then. Funny thing; it always turns up at sunset—so seemingly the journey upstream must be made through the night. Full moon, of course—but I never heard before of any tribe hereabouts that wasn't afraid of the nights. Pulo's contrary to all Archipelago experience, every way."

"The more reason to investigate. Still, if you're so pessimistic, Captain, and if those Consuls weigh upon your mind——" Kellock took from Captain Sibthorpe's grubby fingers (where it was still clasped) the document which he had recently composed, and at the foot of it he wrote :

"P.S.—Against Captain Sibthorpe's advice—most disinterestedly offered—I am now going ashore on Pulo.

"A. D. K."

Captain Sibthorpe perused this addendum, folded the paper, and thrust it into a pocket-book which he produced from the recesses of his pyjamas. Then he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," quoth he, dryly. "Sorry to lose you, Mr. Kellock."

The two men shook hands. Even as they did so there was a sound of plaintive singing across the water, and the plash of paddles.

"Here they come," said the Captain.

Kellock, looking landward, saw that a large low boat, rowed by some dozen or more dark-skinned men, had detached itself from the jungle coast and was skinning over the sea towards the *Orpheus*.

CHAPTER II

THE HALF-CASTE OF GAH-NUNG

"No luggage?" asked Captain Sibthorpe.

"Nothing but this knapsack." Kellock had slung a canvas bag over his shoulder. "Shaving tackle, one clean duck suit, and a wad of manuscript poems: that's all I travel with nowadays."

"Quinine?"

"Fever never touches me."

"Sure you won't borrow my shooter?"

"It's a rule of mine never to carry firearms. I reckon they're a sign of fear. And as I'm not afraid . . . Besides," Kellock added whimsically, "I have a pair of fists."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders. "Well, the boat's alongside, and the ladder's been lowered for you. To-day's Monday. I'll be back here with the *Orpheus* on Sunday next."

"Right. Sunday. I won't keep you waiting. Au revoir."

Kellock moved to the head of the ladder. At its foot lay the long, narrow boat—a modified sampan in type—which had come to take him ashore : a not ungraceful craft, faintly reminiscent, in its curved lines and high prow and stern, of a gigantic Venetian gondola. Its rowers did not sit upon benches : they stood upright to manipulate their paddles. Singularly frieze-like they looked, the double rank of them, now rigid at their posts ; for each man wore a white tunic, clasped at the waist with a sash, and falling about half-way down the thigh. Arms, and the lower part of the legs, and the feet, were bare : the skin glistened like polished rosewood. Yes, there was no denying that, as Captain Sibthorpe had prophesied, these were “healthy niggers”—and (what was still more surprising), exquisitely clean, both as to their persons and their scanty but sensible attire. If these were fair specimens of the Pulo native, the island must be more sophisticated than its external aspect would lead the casual voyager to suppose.

In the stern of the sampan one figure was seated—an older man, evidently in command, and different in appearance from his crew. As Kellock descended the ladder, this individual rose to receive him.

"Sultan of Pulo he send me," he announced, speaking a pidgin - English. "You from Doctor? You got proof?" The respectful salaam with which he began and ended his sentence contradicted the apparent curtness of its grammatical structure.

"Yes, I've got the proof all right," said Kellock.

"Please show"—this with another salaam.

Kellock pulled from his pocket the letter which he had brought. The Sultan's representative glanced only at the envelope's seal, then handed it back.

"True proof," he pronounced. "Give letter to Sultan when come there. Please to enter." He indicated the stern of the boat, where cushions had been arranged to form a comfortable lounging-place.

Kellock stepped on board and sat down; and promptly, at a word of command, the figures of the rowers came to life and the paddles were plunged into the water. With a surprising swiftness the boat darted from under the tall flank of the *Orpheus*.

Looking back, Kellock waved a farewell to that uncouth but friendly vessel. Even as he gazed he saw the ladder hauled up and heard the engine-room bell tinkle. The Captain had

mounted the bridge; his hand was on the telegraph. Beneath the stern the screw commenced to revolve, like some hidden monster agonising in the depths which, a moment before, had been so peaceful, furiously threshing the ocean into a rage of bubbles and spume which soiled the sea's purity. The *Orpheus* had begun to move, a black silhouette against the magnificence of the western heavens. Presently she was naught but a speck athwart the crimson ball of the sun, now poised upon the horizon line. Kellock was still gazing after her when, quite abruptly, a fringe of palms slid into his line of vision and intervened. Only then did he awake from his reverie and become aware that he had entered the mouth of the river.

With sombre suddenness, as twilight fell, the jungle engulfed the sampan and its rhythmic rowers. The river, at first a hundred yards or more in width, soon narrowed to fifty or less, curving so acutely in its course that the sea was lost to sight as though shut off by a moving screen. This screen was composed of impenetrable vegetation: trees and creepers of every sort grew to the bank's edge, their twisted roots rising straight from the water. There was something terrible, something relentless and insane, in the opulent waste of tree life and

of plant life which the mere solidity of such a forest implied. Animal life of a sort could no doubt exist, insect life certainly would teem, bird life might find room for itself; but vegetable life, in the appalling struggle for light and air, must die, strangled by reason of its own fecundity. And indeed at every turn of the stream Kellock noticed great trees, fallen and rotting, often loaded with the blossoms of the parasites which had slain them.

He spoke at last to the man who, crouched at his feet, was directing the rowers.

"What is the name of this river, eh?"

"River name?" The individual addressed did not conceal the fact that he had been waiting to be spoken to and was eager to open a conversation. "River no name. Just river."

"It's simply called The River. I see. And is the Sultan's place far up the river?"

"At top of river, Sultan's place. Mountain there."

"How long shall we take?"

"All night, all day, all night."

"Hum! Thirty-six hours. Quicker on the return journey, I presume, if the current is fast."

"Return journey?" The speaker's eyes fastened themselves on Kellock with a curious expression. "Downstream very fast go. See!"

But Kellock had already seen. The steering of the boat, first edging towards one bank and then under the other's shelter—the straining of the rowers whenever they made a crossing—had indicated clearly that the central current was a force to be avoided. Even in the falling darkness its swirling eddies were visible, oily but vanishing and re-forming with a speed which showed their strength.

“Me steer upstream. No steer downstream,” his informant added.

“The current does the job downstream, eh? Very convenient. I mustn't miss the steamer when I come back.”

Once again Kellock's companion eyed him, and this time his visage was unconcealedly sceptical. It was a rather unpleasant visage, too: craftier, less dignified, than those of the native rowers. This man, it was plain, came of a different stock: his skin was yellowish like that of a Chinaman, his face was seamed and sly, his mouth almost toothless, his cheeks devoid of hair. Kellock experienced an unreasoning sensation less of dislike than of contempt as he examined this guide of his; but in pursuance of his invariable custom he encouraged the creature to be friendly and to talk.

He learnt little that was enlightening. As darkness fell and the stars came out—soon to

be dimmed by a gorgeous tropic moon—the half-caste chattered, in staccato pidgin, about himself. His name, it transpired, was Saumarez: in the distant past some ancestor of his, a Portuguese, had contracted a misalliance with a woman of heaven knows what local tribe—and this cringing, unsavoury freak was one of the results. But Saumarez was very proud of his European name and of that streak of Western blood which tinged his veins: proud, likewise, of the circumstance that he had not always been in Pulo—he had travelled, had seen Penang and Singapore, and in those cosmopolitan resorts had learnt his smattering of English.

“Then why did you settle in Pulo?” Kellock inquired at last.

Saumarez turned away—it almost seemed as though to hide a smile. “Pulo nice place,” he said evasively. “Pulo *happy* island.”

Kellock, his spirit oppressed by the imminence of the jungle, all the blacker by reason of the dazzling disc of the moon, which now hung above them like a lamp, could not concur in this statement. “Happy” was the last term which he would have thought of applying to such portions of Pulo as he had, so far, been privileged to see. Rather it seemed as though a curse brooded over the land.

Nevertheless, "Pulo happy," Saumarez reiterated, and then sighed—a sigh of languid, almost lackadaisical contentment. "Me glad get back." He spoke as though his journey to the sea, to meet the *Orpheus*, had been, for him, an unwelcome interlude.

Kellock pursued the topic no further. He relapsed upon his cushions and surveyed the fathomless firmament, allowing himself to be agreeably mesmerised by its immensity and the flawless moon which blazed—"blazed" was the verb he could not resist—in its midst. Pulo, as Captain Sibthorpe had said, was a mystery, and Kellock, for the nonce, was content to leave it at that. The solution of the mystery would come in due course: it was, to be sure, obviously hastening towards him with every stroke of the paddles.

The wanderings of Alvin Dalroy Kellock, ever since he found freedom, had been an Odyssey; but this promised perhaps to be the strangest of the many strange adventures which had befallen him. And it had come about with complete unexpectedness. Reposing, half drowsing, upon his cushions, lulled by the movement of the boat, and the occasional songs of its oarsmen, Kellock reviewed the incidents which had led to this journey.

He remembered that, at the moment when he had received Dr. Levaloir's summons, he had been shaving. It was early morning: he stood at the window of his room in the cheap sailors' boarding-house where he had slept, and examined his face in the morsel of broken mirror which was fixed by a nail to the wall. Outside the window lay the noisy streets and mud walls of the city of Gah-nung—one of the greatest seaports of the peninsula. Fate had cast Kellock ashore here on the previous afternoon; fate might guide him thence to-morrow—he did not care: it had been pleasant to feel dry land beneath his feet after months afloat, interesting, also, to explore this little-known but populous hive of industry, where India, China, Burmah, Siam and Malaysia met and intermingled in a multicoloured maze of traffickings.

Kellock, then, had finished shaving, and, in the broken mirror, inspected the result. He saw, reflected in the glass, a lean, bronzed face and limpid blue eyes; above the eyes a care-free brow; above the brow a mass of raven-black hair—raven-black all but one flowing lock, brushed upward from the forehead, a lock of startlingly silver-white.

In his college days Kellock had been reckoned the comeliest youngster of his year. Now,

maturer, he was a man who attracted attention wherever he went. He was tall of stature, and his spareness would have been described as lanky were it not for the lithe ease of all his movements. He walked with a spring, yet not jerkily ; his arms, with muscles like cords, were capable of enormous exertion, yet his hands could be as gentle as a child's. An aquiline, clear-cut profile stamped his nationality ; but the unique feature was the silver plume fronting the otherwise uniformly ebon mass of his hair.

Kellock apprehended these details not at all as he looked at himself in the mirror. He was unconscious of his own appearance. All that concerned him was to observe whether his shave had been efficiently performed. Satisfied on this point, he had just dried his chin and stropped his razor, when there was a knock at the door.

The man who entered in response to his call of "Come in !" was, as he afterwards learnt, no less a person than the famous Dr. Levaloir ; but all that Kellock beheld, in the stranger, was a diminutive, elderly, extremely pock-marked half-caste, clad in semi-European clothes and, from his hat to his shoes, exhibiting a dusty shabbiness which gave the impression that the sole object of his visit must be to borrow money—or, worse still, offer to lend it.

"Mr. Kellock?"

"That is my name."

"Pardon the intrusion." The little half-caste spoke perfect English, but with a slight burr. "I have come to ask a favour of you—a favour so urgent that I must throw myself upon your mercy without any apologies."

The opening did not promise well. "Please explain," Kellock said stiffly. His blue eyes were hard; but, as they met those of the half-caste, they softened a trifle. For the half-caste's eyes, though unhealthily jaundiced in the whites, red-rimmed and unpleasing, did not flinch before the young American's gaze; and in their depths, on a sudden, he seemed to detect a strange nobility, pathetic yet courageous.

"You are a newcomer here, and therefore do not know me. My name is Levaloir. I am a doctor. There are certain diseases, peculiar to the East, the study of which has been my life work. The East, Mr. Kellock, is full of sorrows. It is my task to try to alleviate some of those sorrows. I myself am a victim—and God has put it in my heart to pity my fellow-victims. I have come to you because I think you too may share my pity and may be willing to do me and my patients a service—I may say, an incalculable service."

"Why do you assume that I am capable of pity, and how do you know my name—or, indeed, anything whatever about me?"

"Last night," answered Dr. Levaloir, "you found yourself involved in a street quarrel. You knocked a man down—an Arab."

Kellock assented. "He had maltreated a woman—one of those unfortunates in a sing-song saloon: he insulted her and I knocked him down."

"I happened to be passing. After you knocked the man down an angry crowd gathered, threatening you. You were apparently unarmed, but you strode through them and they shrank back. It was admirable."

"It was nothing."

"It is not nothing to have pity for the oppressed, and to own a heart devoid of fear," said Dr. Levaloir. "I saw you beneath a lamp: I saw your face, your perfect calm, your clear eyes. And it came to me that you were the man for whom I had been searching in vain. I caused inquiries to be made—you were followed—thus I learnt your name and the whereabouts of your lodging. So now I have come to put a proposition before you, Mr. Kellock."

Thereafter the little half-caste had expounded a singular—and in parts puzzling—proposal.

It had occupied a considerable time, and its exposition had not taken place wholly in Kellock's room. For presently, when Kellock's interest had been aroused, Dr. Levaloir had conducted him to his own house—a large building, faced with crumbling stucco, and surrounding a courtyard which was thronged with the saddest congregation of human wreckage, men, women, and even children, which Kellock had ever seen. These people were the doctor's patients, waiting to consult him; and as the little half-caste walked through their midst, to reach an inner door (the door of his laboratory), Kellock witnessed a profoundly moving spectacle. The entire crowd uprose and, with bowings and gesticulations and cries which would have been grotesquely funny if they had not been so tragically sincere, blessed the physician as he passed, and prayed him to heal them—exhibiting, at the same time, a harrowing array of wounds, sores, emaciated limbs, and withered hands.

Dr. Levaloir, closing his laboratory door upon this woeful vision, turned to Kellock.

“Now you understand,” he said.

Kellock had truly understood—and his shrewd Western mind had grasped a feature of the affair upon which the half-caste had not

touched. It was manifest that Dr. Levaloir's healing arts were devoted to the very poor: there was no "money" in that ragged crew in the courtyard. It might be that there were wealthier clients; but even if so, the doctor plainly upheld the traditions of his profession—and as the specialists of America and Europe give priceless services free to slum hospitals, so he gave *his* specialism (whatever that might consist of) to the pauper exactly as to the prince.

Scientific apparatus, microscopes, electric batteries, bacteria culture plates, a steriliser, and so forth, were the furnishings of the room into which Kellock had been ushered. Through an inner portal he had a glimpse of another laboratory, where a couple of dark-skinned bespectacled young students, apparently Hindus, were earnestly working with chemicals and test-tubes. Dr. Levaloir spoke to them, then closed this inner portal and came back to Kellock.

"The East is full of sorrows." Mournfully he reiterated the phrase he had used before. "Out there in the courtyard you saw an epitome of one of the chief of those sorrows. Did you remark anything distinctive about that throng, Mr. Kellock?"

"They all seemed sad."

"They have reason to be, poor souls! 'The

sins of the fathers'—what an awful curse! I too labour beneath it. You have but to look at me to guess my nation—that is, *no nation*. I am a half-caste: my father a roving Frenchman who came East . . . and went away again, leaving *me* as the memento of a momentary passion. Mr. Kellock, if you had my experience you would only have needed to cast one glance at those people in the courtyard to perceive that they too are all of them . . . mixed breed.

“Nature forbids, I don't know why, that Europe and Asia should intermarry—or at any rate that certain of their races should intermarry, especially the Latins and the tribes of this particular corner of the continent. Nature curses the impure blood which results: not always, but nearly always. A febrile, weak type of Eurasian, lower in type than the Indian Eurasian, a prey to unaccountable and hideous diseases—he is the outcome of these evil matings. And yet it should not be so.” The doctor was reflective. “There have been startling exceptions, atavistic phenomena. If the best of Europe and the best of Asia could be mated, what a *homo sapiens* we might behold!”

He mused. “Alas! it is not the right kind of white man who elects to mate with an Asiatic woman in this region. You have seen the

scum who loaf about our ports. They are not fit fathers of a race. Their loves are casual, their blood impure; spiritually and physically and intellectually they are outcasts, and their offspring doubly outcasts—a mongrel race.

“Mongrels!” He emphasised the word bitterly. “They die like flies, they breed like flies. And my life is dedicated to them: I am vowed to find out how to save them, to wrest from Nature the secret of their failure, to find its cure, to turn this vast waste of life into a blessing. Meanwhile I study their diseases and alleviate their woes where I can. I am to them a magician, for chance has given me power to exorcise certain of their plagues. But, all the time, I am secretly pursuing a higher aim—not the curing but the prevention of the ills to which this interbreeding has laid us open. And when I reach my goal, the mating of Europe and Asia may be a thing wonderful and beautiful—the repopulation of the earth with races finer and stronger and less selfish than any which now exist.”

He spoke, for a space, elaborating his thesis. Kellock could not tell whether it was an idle dream or the vision of a seer. But of its singleness of purpose and its nobility there could be no question. And—dream or no dream

—the practical side appealed to him: the solid fact that Dr. Levaloir was lifting a load of grief from hosts of precisely those people whom a callous world thinks most contemptible. In the day which followed, Kellock watched the physician at work—admired his tenderness and his skill, and, not once but a score of times, saw him refuse the pittance of money which some grateful patient would have pressed upon his acceptance.

That evening he slept at the doctor's house, and in the cool of the early dawn which followed he and his host held a consultation.

“You have told me,” Dr. Levaloir said, “that you are untrammelled by any ties. You have told me your philosophy, Mr. Kellock, which is (though you do not know it) an ancient one, and which is summed up in the affirmation, ‘I am Free, and I am Unafraid.’ Your blood is pure, I see your eyes are clear, I see that you are clean of breed. Only a man who is clean of breed and who resists temptation can achieve for me and for my stricken ones the service we require. There is an errand to be done for us: a certain drug, a priceless drug, to be fetched from a certain place. I myself cannot go—I am not clean of breed and the place is death to such a one as I am. To you it will threaten no

dangers—if you bear in mind what I have told you, and if you can maintain your pride of race.”

“You speak in riddles, Doctor.”

“The riddles will explain themselves, perhaps—perhaps not. It may be that you will return from the island of Pulo without having experienced any of the perils which would entangle a man of less scrupulous life. The Sultan of Pulo, with whom I have an understanding because I once did him a service, will give you a small leaden flask, containing the precious oil without which both my healing and my physiological experiments must come to a standstill. There the transaction may end. Or . . . it may not. Others have failed, others who gave me their promise as you are doing. Nothing, mark you, prevented their return—nothing, but their own weak wills: some unforeseen spot of baseness within their own souls. . . .”

Thus had Dr. Levaloir spoken; and thus it had come to pass that Kellock was, at this moment, travelling up this uncharted jungle river beneath the tropic moon.

Saumarez, guiding the native rowers with an occasional sharp cry of instruction, saw his white-man passenger draw a writing-tablet from his knapsack, and, in the silvery glimmer,

pencil a few words upon the paper. Kellock, despite the lateness of the hour, felt vividly wakeful, and, as was his wont, was crystallising his thoughts in verse. This was what he wrote :

“O moonlit and mysterious isle,
Set in an alien sea,
I mock your sphinxlike, silken smile,
I mock your mystery !
North, South, West, East, the world is mine,
Its beauties my rich fee ;
My senses crave no anodyne :
I Fear Not—I am Free.”

By the light of the moon he pondered on his little poem with pursed lips. Then he slowly shook his head.

“Feeble !” he murmured to himself. “Very feeble !” And tearing it up, he allowed the pieces to flutter overboard and be carried away by the stream.

They fled so swiftly, like pallid petals on the inky surface, that Kellock was astonished. Then he noticed that the rowers were labouring at their paddles. The current had grown even more powerful.

Kellock watched their toil for a space, then lay back and went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS VALLEY

AT college the old professor of literature, who indulged in a turn for paradoxes, used to say :

“ Few people have sufficient brains to write prose ; but any fool can write poetry.”

Expanding this favourite theme of his he would point out that prose demands precision of thought—the writer must be prepared with something definite to say, or the pitiless exactitude of his sentences will expose him. Whereas “ woolly ideas ” (his phrase for the emotional) would pass muster if clothed—nay, cloaked and concealed—in rhyme.

“ The practice of versification,” he would wind up, “ will not only enable you to hide your lack of brains. (That, I grant, is one of its merits.) Its chief merit, the one I commend not jestingly, is that it will teach you to employ your language : it will compel you to cultivate a vocabulary.”

Kellock was one of the few students who penetrated the old man's flippancy and found the value of the truth which underlay it. At first merely for the sake of self-discipline, afterwards as a hobby which proved a solace in many a tight corner, he had written verse ever since he left college. No intention of publishing ever entered his head, albeit he classified his poems under a series of titles which might well have been the names of books. There were his *Poems of the World's Beauty*, *Verses of Adventure*, *Sea Songs*, *Poems of Strange Peoples*, *Chants of my Freedom*, and the two sets of what he dubbed "the merely idiotic," *Jingles* and *Capricious Rhymes*.

It amused him to scribble thus ; and it was this habit which, no doubt, conferred on him his purity of diction in speech. It was characteristic of Kellock that he used English a shade fastidiously, and though he could be colloquial in conversation he seldom relapsed into slang.

While on the journey up the river into the interior of Pulo there were many hours during which, tired of the unvarying vistas of the jungle, he slept. From time to time, especially during the highest heat of the first day, Saumarez called a halt and the rowers were given food and a siesta. Kellock ate with the

rest—their menu consisted of some fruits which were unfamiliar to him. The trip, for all its monotony, began to develop a charm of its own. It was hypnotic. He was now in no hurry for it to end. The alternate sleeping and waking, the watching of the rhythmic rosewood-coloured limbs of the paddlers, the delights of catching sight of the iridescent butterflies which occasionally hovered over the sampan when it skirted the river-bank—these afforded him a mild yet poignant pleasure. It was this which inspired “Sailing in a Sampan,” one of his *Capricious Rhymes*, which he wrote on the second evening of the trip.

“Sailing in a sampan, that’s the life I love !

Grant, I pray, ye gods, one priceless boon :

Slide me in a sampan through the jungle grove,

Meet this traveller with a tropic moon !

“Send by day the sunshine soothing me to sleep,

Make me drowse so I may deeply dream,

While the panting paddlers cause my craft to creep

Sinuously up the satin stream.”

“Quite inane, of course,” was his verdict as he finished it. “‘Alliteration’s artful aid’ has lured me too far. *Sinuously up the satin stream* is—shocking. I’ll think of an alternative. ‘A Jungle Jingle’ shall be the sub-title ; and I’ll dedicate it to the dear old professor as an almost

faultless demonstration of the truth of his teaching in regard to the ease of verse as compared with prose."

* * * * *

In the glittering dawn of the second day, when Kellock awoke from a rather prolonged slumber and sat up, he found that the river was flowing between steep hillsides. These were jungle-clad to their skylines: no cliffs interrupted the lush veil of wooding. But they gave a variety to the scene, and flecks of foam upon the water, and a muffled vibration in the air, indicated the near neighbourhood of rapids or a cascade.

He had hardly rubbed the sleep from his eyes when the sampan swung round a bend and entered a lagoon-like expansion whose upper neck was closed by the tumbling barrier of a considerable waterfall. Here, for the first time since he had started, Kellock beheld a break in the encircling greenery: a rude pier of stakes beside a shelving shore. Beyond this pier rose a thatched roof, which in a moment revealed itself as that of a boathouse sheltering several sampans similar in design to that in which the journey had been made. One, larger than the rest, painted in garish colours, furnished with a covered place in its stern, and ornamented with

a gilded prow carved in the likeness of a Buddha, was, he guessed, a State barge of the Sultan.

Saumarez gave him no opportunity for a closer examination : almost before he had taken in the fact that the river trip was at an end Kellock found himself stepping ashore. The sampan was moored, with its fellows, and at once the party plunged inland, leaving the river as though (what was not unlikely) they were thankful to see the last of it.

"This way." Saumarez pointed ahead, and Kellock, following him, entered a well-defined path which mounted precipitously through the jungle. The "niggers"—as Captain Sibthorpe had called them—brought up the rear.

Climbing steadily—it was fortunate that most of the way was shaded by overhead foliage—Kellock realised anew how stifling and yet horribly damp was the atmosphere of the island. The sun seemed to suck an unwholesome moisture from the overladen soil : the trees dripped audibly, as though perspiring ; the ground on each side of the path was a morass of fetid oozings. The path itself was firm, it was a pavement of big flat stones, sometimes actually steps, which must have been put in place with enormous labour. Their age appeared great : all were worn smooth and

many had been fractured, either by the solar heat or by earthquake. Kellock, his curiosity aroused as to their origin, would fain have questioned Saumarez, but he had no breath to spare for talking. The pace was too fast. Moreover, questions could wait.

He calculated that they must have ascended not less than a couple of thousand feet when a last flight of steps, on a scale so formidable as to remind him of the pyramid of Cheops in Egypt, brought the party to a ledge bare of trees and backed by a huge archway in the mountain's side. This cave, natural or artificial (a blend of both, in all probability) presented a black and yawning mouth, into which the path plunged.

"Dark piece!" was the muttered comment of Saumarez. His addition, "Soon home now," was more reassuring; albeit "home" was a noun with an *outré* inappropriateness, as Kellock reflected, for so weird a spot of the globe.

The "niggers" ran forward, and produced torches from some nook of the cave's entrance. These were lit, and emitted a smoky illumination, by whose aid Kellock was enabled to proceed.

It was a bizarre procession in which he

marched. The torches were poor, their flickerings a mere will-o'-the-wisp to follow : each revealed little more than the uplifted arm and the shoulder of the man who bore it. The walls of the cave or tunnel, trickling with dew, mirrored the faint flames ; the roof was seldom visible ; and at first the heat was scarcely to be endured : it could only be compared to an intensified form of the vapour within those glazed and steaming forcing-houses where foreign flowers, in a colder clime, are deluded into making ready their frail blossoms for the market of the luxurious. But soon Kellock detected a change. The walls, he saw, had lost their wet sheen : they were dry. The air was thinner, less steamy. The heat, though still terrific, had somehow been purged of its enervating quality.

He stepped ahead more briskly, noticing that his companions, like himself, had ceased to pant with fatigue. A just perceptible current of air fanned his cheek. It was evident that some exit from the tunnel could not be far distant.

Daylight, in fact, now appeared ahead of the travellers. It emanated from an archway similar to the one at which they had entered ; but the archway's semicircular silhouette gave

not upon the jungle but upon an enclosed place, roofed and bounded by walls with a row of windows in them.

This enclosure, Kellock was astounded to find when, with Saumarez, he emerged into it, was nothing more nor less than a handsomely-proportioned room or hall, built of stone and likewise paved. Its windows were of Moorish style, more or less in the manner of the Alcazar, but with lace-like lattice-work, in marble or some other white substance, like the famous tracery in the Taj Mahal. Each minute piercing of this tracery was filled with cobalt blue—the sky; from which it was evident that, outside the building, the ground dropped sharply.

“We have come,” announced Saumarez. “This the Sultan’s palace.”

“A most palatial palace too!” Kellock commented. “You take my breath away, Saumarez. Who on earth ever built this, in the heart of an island of an archipelago where mud and wattle are the height of town-planning idealism?”

“Very old palace. Very old.” Saumarez was vague. “Sultans built. Long ago.”

“An ancestor of the present reigning Sultan, I suppose. It must be a dynasty worth looking

into. Anyhow, when am I to see the Sultan? Is this his audience-chamber, or what?"

"See Sultan soon. Not here. Another room. Come first prepare."

Kellock followed his guide—the natives had vanished—through a curtained recess, and was presented to a small apartment containing a couch and—greatest surprise of all—a beautiful little marble tank of slowly-bubbling water.

"Bath," said Saumarez, monosyllabically.

"Just what I want." Kellock was grateful. "No wonder you called Pulo a happy island."

The queer, sly expression flitted across the half-caste's countenance again. "Pulo bath—" he began. Then, inexplicably, "This not Pulo bath." He moved across the room, into an alcove: "See! Hot here!"

And behold, dribbling from a pipe into a kind of basin, there was hot water—nearly boiling, as Kellock's inquiring finger quickly told him.

"Hot water laid on from a hot-water tap! Well, I *am* at a first-class hotel!" The young American marvelled.

"Volcano send it," said Saumarez.

"A volcanic spring?"

"Plenty hot springs here. You see later."

"I must certainly explore. Meanwhile, a wash and a shave——"

Saumarez salaamed and withdrew.

Kellock instantly did what he had been longing to do, but what, for some occult reason, he had not done as long as the half-caste remained : he went to the window.

It was, like the ones in the entrance-hall, a cupola-shaped, unglazed aperture fringed with pierced traceries and supported by slender pilasters. At a slight distance it framed naught but the profoundly blue sky ; arrived at it, and leaning on its sill, Kellock was able to look downwards and examine the landscape beneath.

A wonderful landscape it was.

The palace—he now saw that he was not on its ground floor but in a second storey—was built against a cliff which rose above a wide cup in the hills, a nearly circular valley several miles in circumference. No great geological knowledge was required to perceive that the valley was volcanic, might even itself be the crater of an extinct volcano. Except locally, in patches of fairy-like trees and other vegetation totally unlike the ruthless jungle of the island's outer side, the valley was formed of bare rock, vast slopes and curves of lava,

twisted and undulating in the shapes in which it had once flowed and cooled.

Far-off promontories looked like ashes: no green thing grew upon them, and they were dull-surfaced, not reflecting the sun. But the nearer concavities of the great cup, the lava-beds, had a sort of polish upon which the sun beat furiously. This, then, was the cause of the air's dryness. The valley of naked rock, like a heliostat, collected the heat—Kellock could feel, without the aid of any thermometer, that the temperature was fierce—but it was dry, not moist, and the body luxuriated in it instead of being made flaccid. The climate—if this was a fair sample—might with accuracy have been advertised as “bracing.”

Who were the inhabitants of this extraordinary retreat? Kellock scanned the scene with intense curiosity for signs of life.

Close beside the palace, amongst the trees of one of the rare oases in the lava, there were huts constructed in the usual archipelago style—thatch and sticks and matting. Brown figures, each clad in its white tunic, moved to and fro: these were obviously the natives of whom, in the boat, he had already encountered an attractive sample. But further off, beneath the shelter of another declivity, there stood an

edifice less normal—a second palace, in fact : a structure of colossal proportions with scores, hundreds, of window-openings, and flanked at its base by elaborate porches and pavilions. And in front of this second palace, lounging or strolling, were other and very different figures, clad, truly, in the inevitable tunics, but with arms and lower limbs not rosewood-coloured but—at least, so it seemed at this distance—white !

“ Can there be *whites* here ? ” Kellock gasped. “ And ”—he looked again—“ women as well as men ? ”

He gazed for a while, then abandoned the window, opened his knapsack, unfolded his clean duck suit, and prepared to enjoy the bath.

But there was a frown upon his brow.

Somehow—unreasoningly—he did not like the look of those pigmy figures in the distance. The rosewood-coloured natives he had admired ; but those whites . . . no, there was something *wrong* about those whites.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATHERS

A TRAY of fruits, luscious and refreshing, had been brought to Kellock by a native servant, as soon as he had bathed. This meal he had eaten with a good appetite: he had seldom felt more healthily ready for food, more "well" in body and more keen in mind.

And now the curtains of his room were pushed apart and Saumarez appeared, with the announcement:

"Sultan ready."

Kellock followed him. At the other end of the entrance-hall they descended a shallow staircase to the ground floor of the palace. Here was a portal to the outer air—an arch with gates which stood open wide. But Saumarez turned aside and ushered the young American into a room on the left.

They passed through heavy curtains, and Kellock, who had put on his pith helmet, now

with some ceremony removed it, baring his head. For it was evident that he was in the presence of the Sultan.

This potentate was, to be sure, recognisable less by any particular visibility of his person than by the circumstances of his placing. He sat throned, in Eastern fashion, upon a high raised divan—a muffled figure so hooded and enwrapped that only his eyes were to be seen. Around him, at a lower level, stood a motionless and mute guard of natives—attendants, perhaps, rather than guards, for they were not armed : these, with slightly bowed heads, paid no attention whatever to the entrance of Saumarez and Kellock.

The latter had already been a little uncertain as to the correct behaviour to be pursued before the ruler of Pulo : he desired to strike an adequate note of deference without obsequiousness. But Saumarez' attitude gave him the cue. The half-caste merely bowed towards the Sultan and then stepped forward in a manner almost casual.

Kellock bowed too, and produced from his pocket the letter which he had brought from Dr. Levaloir. This, with another bow, he proffered to the figure on the divan.

The figure on the divan did not stir, and for

a moment Kellock was left in the incongruous posture of holding at arm's length an envelope which nobody was accepting. Saumarez promptly saved the situation, took the missive from Kellock's hand and laid it on a carved octagonal table which stood beside the Sultan's divan.

There followed what—to the impetuous American temperament — seemed like an awkward pause. The Sultan had neither stirred nor spoken; the natives likewise had neither stirred nor spoken—they stood, in the fashion of images, with bowed heads; Saumarez had uttered no word; neither, of course, had Kellock — partly because he did not know whether etiquette would allow of his initiating a conversation, but mainly because he had no acquaintance with the language. The Sultan's eyes — his only visible feature — regarded Kellock with a sustained scrutiny which was disconcerting. Yet Kellock found himself interested in, nay, magnetised by, those eyes. They were large and dark, their shape a perfect oval; the lids were fringed with ebony lashes and the eyebrows were a pair of faultless arcs, wide apart and classical in their flowing curve. There was something—Kellock sought for an adjective—something *aristocratic* about those

eyes : their owner was not merely of finer clay than the wretched Saumarez, but also finer than the attendant natives. And his eyes were gravely penetrating : the examination which Kellock felt he was undergoing was an intelligent one, its verdict would be shrewd.

At last, when to Kellock the tension had become acute, the muffled figure on the divan quietly spoke—addressing Saumarez.

The language was unfamiliar to Kellock, but the voice was low and musical.

Saumarez interpreted. "Sultan read letter, not now. Later see you. Sultan say : you walk out, see place, come back."

And that was all.

Kellock bowed, and, again conducted by Saumarez, quitted the audience-chamber. As he passed out through the curtains he had a sense of the Sultan's dark, inscrutable, but queerly intelligent orbs boring into the back of his head.

"The Sultan, I gather, has given me permission to explore," said Kellock, when he and Saumarez arrived at the door of the palace.

"Go walk," said Saumarez.

This was exactly what Kellock was eager to do. He had imagined, for some reason undefined, that there would be objections to his investigat-

ing the valley ; but, so far from any obstacles being put in his way, Saumarez seemed rather anxious than otherwise that he should see whatever there was to be seen. More surprising still, it at once became apparent that Saumarez had neither any intention of accompanying him nor of providing a guide.

“ Go walk,” the half-caste repeated, broadly indicating the outer air. “ Me stay, speak with Sultan. You go where like go. You find Pulo happy place.”

With which assurance Kellock was abandoned to his own devices.

He donned his helmet at once, and passed out between the gates into the glare of the sunshine.

Yes—there were things which he was urgently curious to investigate. But first he must take his bearings, so as to be able to find his way back again. He observed the lie of the land in relation to the point at which he stood, he noticed (by his wrist-watch) the hour, and marked the position of the sun. Then he had a careful look at the façade of the palace—a much plainer building, more fortress-like, than the other one which he had observed in the distance. It bore the marks of antiquity. Cracks were visible here and there on its walls, and the

pillar of one of its outer porches had fallen. The massiveness of the structure was nevertheless striking; its back parts were anchored, as it were, in the cliff and merged with the natural rock in an indistinguishable joint. The dry air had left the materials of the edifice uncorroded; nothing short of a cataclysm could destroy this monumental architecture.

Kellock turned again, and, treading on a smooth pavement of lava, made for the neighbouring oasis of trees. Nestling within their green shade was the native village, but this he traversed rapidly. He could examine it on another occasion. Beyond it, a mile or more round the curve of the valley, was situated the second palace: its denizens, the white folk, were his goal.

He found some of them sooner than he had expected.

Leaving the last of the village and coming again on to a sun-scorched expanse of lava, he had seen, at some distance in front of him, a jumble of boulders and scoriæ which formed a mound. At its summit there must be a patch of earth, for here a group of palms had taken root. From those palms it was probable that a view could be obtained, and Kellock aimed towards them.

Twenty minutes' clamber brought him to the palms, and the vision which burst upon his gaze was unforgettable.

In a hollow of the hill, almost beneath his feet, lay a small lake. Its waters were of a milky opalescent hue, the sun's rays were reflected and refracted in them as though from the sheen of mother-of-pearl or of silk—silk which changed its colour according to the angle of the folds upon which the light falls: "shot" silk, in the technical designation. The opalescence shifted and altered and re-coalesced with every slightest disturbance of the water. And the water was being continuously disturbed. For the lake was alive with bathers.

Here, in brief, were the white people—or some of the white people—whom Kellock sought.

He stared in amazement. Some of the bathers were swimming, others lolling and floating, some came forth from the water and lay down upon a beach of sand. Nearly instantaneously, Kellock noticed, their tunics—all were clad in the inevitable tunic, whether in the water or not—were dried by the heat of the sun: the tunic which clung round each swimmer as he came dripping from the lake was, a moment later, hanging loosely in its

usual shape. Never was there such informal, such simple bathing. No dressing or undressing, no preparations of any sort . . . the bathers, men and women alike, just went in and out of the lake whenever the fancy took them.

There was, perhaps, a lethargy in their movements, and, as they strolled about the beach or lounged on the sand, they talked little. Faint sounds of speech rose to Kellock's ears, and now and then there was a burst of quiet laughter. It ought, somehow, to have been a gay scene; but, somehow, it was not. It held a certain beauty, the observer had to confess. Many of the figures were graceful, and the tunics, leaving arms and legs bare—heads were bare too—had a fine appropriateness. But . . . well . . . Kellock came back to this: Who *were* these people? What were white people *here* for?

He looked about him, and suddenly became aware that he was not alone. Beneath the shadow of a boulder, within a few yards of him, two figures were reposing: the figures of a man and a woman.

They were both asleep, the woman with her face pillowed on her arms, the man lying face upwards with a hand over his eyes. Hardly had Kellock noticed the couple when the man,

with a great sigh of contentment, awoke, and raised himself into a sitting posture.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. He looked at Kellock, and the latter, startled as he had been to be addressed in his own language, was still more taken aback (he hardly knew why) by the casualness not only of the word but of the tone in which it was uttered. Its utterer was visibly neither very much surprised by the apparition of a stranger nor very much interested.

"Hallo!" Kellock echoed; and plunging straight to the point added: "My name's Kellock. I'm an American. Who are you?"

"My name's Van Duysen. I'm American too."

So this was the Van Duysen whom Captain Sibthorpe's friend Carnegie, of the steamship *Pearl*, had three times taken back from Pulo and lost there on the fourth visit!

"I come from Dr. Levaloir," said Kellock.

"Dr. Levaloir?" Van Duysen ruminated. "Oh yes. I remember him. Lives at Gah-nung." He yawned. "That's how *I* first came here."

He made this statement in a listless fashion. His whole air was sluggish. Yet in appearance Van Duysen was not unattractive. His features were well formed, and his beard—he wore a

short beard—was neatly trimmed. His arms and legs were muscular. But their colour was oddly pale—they were not tanned by the sun, as might have been expected. And his eyes did not meet Kellock's with any steadiness: they were clouded and restless, and the mouth was loose. Van Duysen (Kellock felt) had been a handsome man, but was in rapid process of losing his handsomeness and becoming effeminate and flabby.

"You used to come to Pulo from Gah-nung for Dr. Levaloir, I believe." Kellock tackled the riddle. "Captain Carnegie brought you on the *Pearl*. Why did you stop here, in the end, instead of going back?"

"I suppose I found it better to stop here." Van Duysen was evasive.

He rose slowly to his feet. "Lovely sight, isn't it?" He scanned the lake. "Loveliest place on earth, this. Guess you'd better stop too. Never regret it."

"I've promised to go back."

"One of these days perhaps you'll find you *can't* go back. You'll never be sorry. A man can settle here, and never be sorry about anything again. No worry. Stupid to worry. Wonderful life."

His voice tailed into silence.

"We're all happy here," he resumed. "I'm going down to the lake now. Great, the lake is. Makes you feel fine. You must try the lake. Come and visit me some time. I live in that place over there. You've seen it? It's an old palace. 'Suleiman's Pleasure-House' is the native name for it. The legend is that Solomon built it and came here to bathe. Knew a thing or two, this Solomon. Not the Biblical Solomon, I surmise: there are crowds of big-pot Suleimans in the East. Anyhow, he built a top-notch palace. We have rooms in it, Zuaila and I. You must meet Zuaila. Oh, I forgot; she's here."

He turned and spoke to the woman, who had continued to slumber undisturbed.

She awoke at once, and lifting her head turned towards Kellock a face of curious and exotic witchery.

It was the face of a woman of perhaps thirty years of age. Yet there was a childishness about it, and, when she rose to her feet, there was a childishness also about the slender elegance of her figure. What, however, was so peculiar in her appearance was the hue of her skin. She was abnormally pale, with the pallor of porcelain: her limbs and face were alike in this. The complexion was clear—but

pale, pale ; the lips, only, shone with such a vivid carmine, in the midst of the white, that Kellock was fantastically reminded of the painted lips of an actress on the stage. Beautiful—yes, this woman whom Van Duysen addressed as Zuaila was beautiful : eyes, lips, soft cheeks, and the mass of copper hair which was piled on her tiny head—they made a picture of striking attractiveness. And, with it all . . . something *wrong*.

“ Pretty, isn’t she ? ” said Van Duysen. “ I’m teaching her English.”

Zuaila smiled at Kellock, then put her hand in Van Duysen’s.

“ Were going to bathe,” said Van Duysen. “ Come and see us some time. You’ll like the Pleasure-House.”

He and Zuaila, hand in hand, moved down the hill towards the lake. Presently Van Duysen halted, and called back :

“ Think about staying ! Room for you too in the Pleasure-House ! ”

Then he went on, and in a few minutes Kellock saw him, and the woman, launch themselves into the lake and slowly swim, side by side, through its opalescent water towards the opposite bank.

“ I think I begin to understand,” muttered

Kellock, "why, when Carnegie failed to bring back his passenger, the doctor groaned something about 'Lotus Land.' . . . No, I don't like the look of this Van Duysen."

He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "A case of 'Where every prospect pleases, and only Man is vile,' I fancy. Hallo!" His nostrils expanded. "I seem to recognise that perfume!"

A faint, sweet odour was rising from the lake—an odour resembling that of some delicate flower, not powerful, but thin and exhilarating. It made Kellock think of violets . . . no, of the artificial perfume which is sold under the trade name of Violet Scent, but, a purely chemical product, has had no genuine connection with the flower it imitates.

"To bathe in perfumed waters is the last touch of sybaritism," he commented grimly. "It seems I've struck the fount and origin of the off-shore smell which so offended the taste of the excellent Sibthorpe. Maybe the old chap's instincts weren't far wrong."



CHAPTER V

THE SULTAN OF PULO

“They taught us not at College how to taste the Tree of Knowledge,

So we wander, lone and hungry. . . . Let's believe
That though, as once in olden times poor Adam's eyes
were holden,

—Somewhere in every orchard there's an Eve.

“‘Life's hard on the transgressor,’ said our Chemistry Professor,

And with spectroscope in hand he bade us note
That though we mightn't think it, still, no scientist can
blink it,

—Somewhere in every sunbeam there's a mote.”

From “Capricious Rhymes,” by Alvin D. Kellock.

HIS musings were broken in upon by the voice of Saumarez. The half-caste, who had been sent to fetch Kellock for a second interview with the Sultan, had experienced no difficulty in finding the young American, for the latter's figure had stood forth clearly on the skyline beside the palms on the crown of the hill.

Saumarez led the way back to the Sultan's palace. *En route* thither Kellock ventured a few questions: What was the name of the bathing lake? Why were its waters that unusual colour? Who were the bathers?—but Saumarez was uncommunicative, or else did not understand.

“Me go bath, too—often—very happy,” was his chief admission. “Nice bath. Make feel well.”

At the palace, and once more in the audience-chamber, the only change which Kellock observed was that Dr. Levaloir's envelope had been opened, and its letter now lay unfolded upon the octagonal table. But immediately after he entered the attendant native guards were dismissed and retreated through a further door. The Sultan then uttered a few words to Saumarez.

“Sultan he speak with you alone,” the half-caste interpreted. “I go.” Suiting the action to the words, he too vanished.

Kellock was bewildered. How on earth was he to hold converse, lacking an interpreter, with the Sultan? He stared at the hooded figure on the *daïs*. Its eyes were still the only sign of life visible. These returned his stare, as before.

And then, suddenly, the Sultan spoke.

"Do not fear"—the voice was low and gentle as before, but this time it spoke English, and without the slightest trace of a foreign accent—"Do not fear."

"I don't fear," Kellock answered. "I was only in a dilemma as to how we should talk to each other. You did not let me understand, at our previous interview, that you knew English."

"I did not know whether I wished to speak with you or not. It might have seemed good to me to give you what you seek and let you go without parley. I wished to look at you, and make up my mind."

"You had a long look at me," Kellock smiled.

"I had a long look at you," the Sultan concurred. "Travellers have come here, and I have had a long look at them and not spoken with them—they have merely gone forth and joined those others at Suleiman's Pleasure-House. But you are not like them. To you I wish to speak. To you I wish to reveal myself."

Kellock, had there not been something oddly serious about this announcement, might have concealed a grin, for the muffled figure on the divan could do with a good deal of "revealing." He had not even seen the Sultan's hands, which were wrapped in his long sleeves: not

even the mouth, from which issued such admirable English, was visible.

"You are to be trusted," the Sultan went on. "You are a man."

"And *you*," Kellock ejaculated, "are a woman!"

For the wrappings of the muffled figure had, with a gesture, been tossed aside: they tumbled loosely on the throne and on the floor in front of it, and from their midst stepped—as Kellock had perceived with a gasp—no "Sultan," but a woman, young and vivid, though dignified and grave.

Like all her subjects—if the inhabitants of Pulo were really her subjects—she wore the tunic of the country. Hers only differed from the common pattern in that it was embroidered at the hem with golden stitchings, was girdled at the waist with a golden snake belt, and was fastened at the breast with a gold scarab brooch. But at this first glance Kellock was of small mind to pay attention to the details of her attire. Its wearer was herself too fascinating.

Her limbs and face were olive-coloured, smooth and flawless in texture. The fine eyes he had already appreciated; now, revealed in relation to her other features, and divorced from the masculine attributes with which he

had mistakenly endowed them, their loveliness was startling. Their colour tended to brown rather than black; it was, however, not their colour so much as their shape which gave them their character—the suave oval of them, the long lashes, the ebony-black sweep of the wide brows above, the chaste curve of the temples.

The forehead was broad and low : a straight band of ebony-black hair fringed it. All around the head the hair fell in an aureole to the nape of the neck : there it was cut short, so that it did not quite reach the shoulders. It was glossy, and had a slight ripple ; but its effect was that of a sharply-defined frame to the face.

The face was not East Indian in type—it approximated to no type with which Kellock was familiar. All he could say of it was that he had never seen anything so elusively beautiful before. The mouth was small, the nose straight, the chin voluptuous yet firm. There was a perfect symmetry and proportion about it all which was, in Kellock's experience, unique. And this perfect proportion was not limited to her face : it prevailed throughout her whole body. She had risen from the divan, and, standing at her full height, it was evident that she was exceptionally tall—almost as tall as Kellock himself. This, and her poise, gave an

effect of slimness to her figure, though its limbs were, in fact, fully rounded and athletically robust. From her ankles to her breast her contours flowed in serene and subtle curves. The curves of her bare arms were beautiful, the curves of the column of her throat were beautiful. All was beautiful. All, too—he had thought of the word even when he had only seen her eyes—was aristocratic.

And this matchless creature was the “Sultan” of Pulo !

“You are not a Sultan after all !” he blurted.

“It is our fiction that no woman shall reign,” she said. “So when a woman *does* reign, the priests have to perform ceremonial rites, and thereafter she is understood to be masculine. I inherited the throne from my father, who was Sultan before me. He had no other heir. So now I am Sultan.”

“How comes it that you speak English ?”

“Why shouldn’t I ? I was educated at a mission school on the mainland. Even if I hadn’t been sent to school I should have been able to speak English. My father was an Englishman.”

“But you said he was Sultan of Pulo.”

“So he was. It is not the first time that roving Englishmen have become rulers in

the East. You remember Rajah Brooke of Sarawak?"

Another question trembled on Kellock's lips, as his eyes dwelt upon her olive face, but he left it unformulated.

"Come," she said. "We can talk more at ease in my own apartments."

She stepped down from the daïs, and with swaying, undulating tread—her bare feet falling lightly yet with a firm grip upon the ground—she preceded Kellock from the audience-chamber into what might have been called, in Western parlance, her boudoir.

It was a lesser, more intimate room. A great metal lantern hung by a chain from its ceiling; faded but ornate rugs carpeted its floor; a flowering plant stood in a vase close to two cushioned divans against an angle of the wall. But of feminine touches, in the ordinary sense, there were none—no ornaments, no bric-à-brac, no books. She was well-educated, evidently—yet there were no books! Kellock, mentally taking stock of her room, missed from it *books* more than anything else.

She sank on to one of the divans, and indicated the other to Kellock.

"Sit down, please."

He did so.

Suddenly her lips parted in a trill of laughter.

"How solemn we are!" she exclaimed.

And looking at her Kellock beheld a girlish mischief dancing in her eyes.

He was to learn later that she could change, thus, in a trice from the woman of rather aloof dignity to the elfish, gay, utterly human girl: that the haughty mouth could shape itself for smiles and that the lips could pout with caprice. But at the instant he was disconcerted.

Then he too laughed. "I thought a Sultan was rather a solemn affair, anyway. You see I'm new at Sultans."

"O White Plume!—I shall call you White Plume—it was the first thing I noticed about you when Saumarez brought you in and you took your hat off and I saw your hair—make no mistake: a Sultan is just the same as anybody else. And *this* Sultan . . . is dying for a talk!"

Kellock could understand that. No doubt, in her isolation here, she yearned for tidings of the outer world. Perhaps she wished to hear, too, of Dr. Levaloir.

"Your friend, Dr. Levaloir——" he began.

"I never met him," she interrupted. "It was my father who knew him. My father was

at Gah-nung once, and was taken ill. He had heard of Dr. Levaloir's fame as a physician and sent for him, but the doctor wouldn't come, though my father, as Sultan of Pulo, offered him a rich fee. So my father was carried in a litter to the doctor's house, and was treated there with the poor people and was cured. And in gratitude he gave Dr. Levaloir the privilege of receiving from Pulo, at intervals, the sacred oil."

"It's a very valuable drug, I understand. The doctor seems to set great store by it."

"It is distilled by the priests. A minute flaskful is the result of many months, sometimes even years, of distillation: the absolute essence of the waters of the lakes and baths of this valley."

"I saw people bathing in a lake this morning." Kellock hesitated. "Were they bathing to cure themselves of some sickness?"

Her face became serious again. Instead of answering his question, she asked him another. "They looked well enough, didn't they?"

"They *looked* well; and yet . . ."

"*And* happy?" she persisted.

"Happy in a sense. But . . . I met a fellow-countryman of mine, Van Duysen. He had been a messenger for Dr. Levaloir. Now why

had this Van Duysen stayed here instead of going back to Gah-nung?"

"I know the man you mean. He stayed here, as others have stayed here"—her long-lashed lids descended over her eyes—"because he wanted to stay, I imagine."

He looked at her, and said, with the frankness which was habitual with him: "You are concealing something from me, I think."

"Pulo is no mystery to those who stay; they have penetrated its mystery and found happiness."

"Yet, judging by Van Duysen's appearance, they pay a price."

"Oh, Van Duysen!" She shrugged. "He could hardly . . . he is infinitely better here than he would have been anywhere else. That kind of man . . ."

"*What* kind of man?"

"Did you notice the palms of his hands, or his finger-nails?" she said coolly. "It's a long way back, but there must be mixed blood in this American of yours: negro blood. Did you notice that Saumarez, the man who acts as my Prime Minister, is a half-caste? Did you see closely any of the other people—not the ones in the native village? They're all half-castes of one kind or another. The natives of

the villages of this valley are pure-bred. All the other inhabitants are in Pulo because—well, because Pulo is the ‘happy place’ for such as they. The Opal Baths—they are called the Opal Baths in our language—are life itself to them. If any of those people left here they would die.”

“But Van Duysen left here three times, and didn’t die.”

“He hadn’t bathed in the Opal water.”

“You mean that on the fourth visit he *did* bathe and thereafter was unable to leave Pulo. Then the Opal Baths are dangerous?”

“Not to those who are pure of blood. You, White Plume, could plunge yourself in the Opal water, and its drug would only refresh you, it could do you no hurt. And with the real inhabitants of Pulo it is the same. The pure-bred native can use the Opal water and—you have seen how fine and strong my people are. But the half-caste——”

“The half-caste——?”

“If he bathes it gives him life if he is diseased already. If he is not diseased already it still gives him life . . . but at a price. Long, long life,” she murmured, “but at a price.”

“But——”

She lifted her hand in a gesture of forbiddal. "Another time!" Her mood had altered again. "No more for the present! Let's talk about something else, White Plume!"

He obeyed her whim as best he could. But, as he tried, at her request, to tell her something about his life and adventures, at the back of his mind he was preoccupied with other thoughts. And the most intrusive one was this: Did *she*, nay, *could* she, risk those Opal waters herself?

That exquisite olive skin of hers . . .

The natives were brown, rosewood-coloured . . .

Her father was an Englishman . . .

Her mother . . . ?

He became aware that her attention had wandered. Had she, after all, been so very anxious to hear news of the outer world? As long as he had talked about himself she had been interested, but he was no great raconteur of his own achievements, and had soon gone on to speak of places and events of less personal import. Whereupon her tense figure had by degrees slackened; her interjections of encouragement had become fewer and more perfunctory. It was not exactly that she looked "bored": simply that her grave aloofness had descended on her once more; her eyes had ceased to sparkle.

"But I'm afraid I'm growing tedious," he said. "Perhaps you'd prefer to be alone? Have I"—he rose—"your permission to withdraw . . . Sultan? Do I, by the way, address you as Sultan?"

"My name," she smiled, "is one which means, in English, 'Queen.'" She too rose, and with one of her charming, girlish gestures, added: "You can call me Queen, if you like. But my father had another name for me. He called me Jewel. And you can call me Jewel if . . . you think it more suitable, White Plume."

Sometimes she was Queen and at other times she was Jewel, he reflected.

"The sultry hours of the afternoon have come," she said. "It is time for the siesta. We people of Pulo awake again to enjoy the evening and the moonlight of the night. Go and sleep awhile, White Plume; and afterwards you can learn more—if you will—of this happy valley of ours."

CHAPTER VI

QUEEN—AND GIRL

KELLOCK, reclining on the couch in his own apartment, could not sleep.

The afternoon sun poured into the room through the arched window, projecting a luminous image of the window's shape partly upon the opposite wall and partly upon the floor. A dazzling triangle of this sunshine lay across the tank sunken in the centre of the floor, and penetrated its pellucid water with a myriad vibrating rays. The water of this bath, which bubbled from some concealed orifice, was not opaline—it was ordinary pure spring water. Kellock comprehended now what Saumarez had been driving at when he had remarked that this was not a Pulo bath. It harboured none of that chemical compound which discoloured the lake and caused the exhalation of the perfume of violets: the unnamed drug that rendered Pulo, to Saumarez and Van Duysen and the rest, a place of happiness.

Certain facts seemed to be emerging more or less tangibly from the confusion of hypotheses and conjectures in Kellock's mind. Adding what he had witnessed at the lake to what he had learnt from Jewel (yes, he would call her Jewel) and from Dr. Levaloir, it became evident that the volcanic baths contained some property to which persons of hybrid birth were exceedingly susceptible. The distilled oil from Pulo was, indeed, applied for therapeutic purposes by the doctor at Gah-nung. But his employment of it was scientific, and probably cautious: further, some bacteriological preparation was involved in the process. Here, at Pulo, the very attributes which might on the one hand be curative might on the other hand induce disease if recklessly used.

Van Duysen, for instance. . . .

To describe Van Duysen as diseased would not be fair. He betrayed no symptom of disease. He was only—decadent.

Zuaila—was that fairylike creature's charm the charm of health? No. There was something about Zuaila also that suggested the obscurely decadent.

In Jewel there was nothing of the sort. Kellock, troubled with doubts concerning her even while they talked together, had—almost

against his own will : it seemed like sacrilege—covertly sought for any sign in her appearance of the intangible “wrongness” which characterised the non-native inhabitants of the valley. But Jewel, to the tips of her almond fingernails, was wholesome. Her eyes were dimmed with no cloudiness, her limbs were not lax—their every movement was a lilting rapture ; the tones of her voice held no listlessness—their cadence was melodious and sweet.

Kellock lay back with a sigh.

How beautiful she was : how ineffably beautiful !

In his *Poems of the World's Beauty* there was a sub-section, *The Wonder of Women*. Not that he had ever been in love, or ever penned a love-lyric. He had not been blind to the beauty of women any more than to the other beauties which made the world and his wanderings a perpetual joy to his ardent and free spirit. And from time to time, the beauty of a woman's face—perhaps only glimpsed in a crowd—had inspired him in much the same way that the beauties of the sky or the sea inspired him. Thus *The Wonder of Women* was only a small portion of his larger *Poems of the World's Beauty*—a typical and significant touch of the young American's ascetic and modest simplicity.

One of the poems in *The Wonder of Women* was begun during this particular afternoon. He may have finished it—or composed introductory verses as the case may be—at a later date. The fragment which was written as he now rested on his couch ran as follows :

“God made a woman, fair to see,
And, with her, God made Minstrelsy :
For, when God made her straight and strong,
God made a Song.

“God made her beautiful that we
Might learn to praise His potency :
For, when God makes a thing so fair,
He makes a Prayer.

“A Prayer, a Song—so should it be
For Man from Woman’s purity . . .
But, when the man’s heart holds her dear,
God gives him Fear.”

It was only an idea—a random, unseizable idea which was floating in Kellock’s brain, half apprehended and half held at bay ; but the verses caught at the skirts of it, as it were : in the very act of evolving them on his scribbling-pad he was giving himself a hint of his own peril. For was it not his habit to affirm : “I am Free, I am Unafraid ”—and were not both brave boasts vaguely menaced by the fate which

seemed to hover in the atmosphere of the happy valley?

The conundrums which perplexed him had, at all events, been banished by the act of writing, for, while the sun-rays crept across the floor and up the wall of his room, he slept peacefully.

He was awakened by a slight sound, the origin of which he failed for the instant to detect; then, more fully aroused, he saw that the tablet on which he had been writing, and which he had wedged under the pillow of his couch, had inexplicably slipped, with a slight *flop*, to the floor.

Sitting up, he stared at it with some surprise. What could have caused it to fall? And what—his gaze was traversing the room—what was agitating the waters of the bath? Their surface was swaying to and fro; a wet patch, at the brink, showed that they had actually splashed over, for an inch or two. And his sun-hat, which he had laid on the floor (no pegs, in such a place, to hang a hat on!)—why was it rocking hither and thither in that absurd fashion? And the curtains of the door—why were they swinging slightly?

“White Plume!” He heard his name called, from outside the curtains.

"Jewel! Come in!"

She pushed the curtains aside, and stood before him, smiling.

"You felt it?"

"Felt what?" he asked.

"The earthquake shock. These small shocks are very frequent here. I forgot to warn you. See how your hat is wobbling!" She was merry. "I came to find out if you were afraid."

As she paused, her pearly teeth still displayed between her laughing lips, her supple arm uplifted in the attitude of holding the curtains apart, he felt a sudden pang and knew that—yes—he *was* afraid: only not in the manner she implied. The thought was gone again at once. But his pulse was still beating with an unwonted irregularity as he sprang up and, answering her smile with a smile of his own, said:

"Oh, I'm never afraid."

"Had a good sleep? You're hungry, I expect. Permit me to invite you to dine with the Sultan of Pulo: to break bread and take salt—only," she rattled on as she led him to her boudoir—"only, to be exact, we haven't either bread or salt; nothing but the fruits which you've already sampled and, I hope, found pala-

table. They are our speciality, peculiar to this valley and this climate. Frutarism is here not a virtue, but a necessity. We're too lazy to grow anything that needs much cultivation : perhaps that's it. And there are no *fauna* for us to slay and devour ; besides, no one ever does any killing—we have an uncivilised distaste for death, whether our own or our fellow-creatures' ! The meal which I can offer you will consequently be nourishing rather than ornamental."

She did not stop in her boudoir : she took him through it and out into an enclosed courtyard where, in a sort of loggia under a canopy supported by slender pillars, two heaps of cushions were placed one on each side of a very low table—its carved legs were barely a foot high—loaded with the fruits to which she had alluded.

Kellock surveyed the courtyard. It carried his memory back to Spain—one of the many countries he had visited—to the Court of the Myrtles in the Alhambra at Granada. Here there was no myrtle hedge, it was true ; the resemblance was traceable only to two factors : the Mauresque devices of the architecture and the fact that the central, open space of the court was occupied by a deep rectangular marble

tank—a swimming-bath in size—brimming with clear water.

Beyond the vista of another colonnaded loggia or cloister a second court was visible. It, too, had its huge oblong bathing-pool of marble. But in this second instance the waters obscured the marble pavement underneath them: they were thickly opaline. The first bath, the bath close to whose brink he and Jewel were to partake of their meal of fruits, contained plain water, like the bath in his room. The further bath was Pulo water—silken and scented and . . . “wrong.”

“These are the Sultan’s Baths,” said Jewel. And answering his unspoken question: “This one, of course, the clear-water one, is the one I myself bathe in. Would you like to bathe here too?”

“That would be splendid!” He scanned the superb pool with enthusiasm. The sun had not yet sunk: the eastern wall of the court was ablaze with its light: the motionless waters glowed under the reflection.

“You swim?”

“Yes.” He had been a champion swimmer in his schooldays.

Her eyes sparkled. “I love swimming. We’ll swim a race, you and I, White Plume.

Let us bathe before the sun goes. Afterwards we can eat."

Impulsively she ran back into her boudoir, and returned, carrying a tunic: an unembroidered native tunic with a sash girdle.

"Go and put this on." There was no trace of embarrassment in her proposal. "It is the Priests' Law of Pulo. Everybody must wear the tunic. Besides," she bubbled mirthfully, "you couldn't very well bathe in that nice suit of yours."

He accepted her suggestion with a corresponding simplicity, ran up to his room, and in a moment was down again, tunic-clad.

"It's very becoming." She appraised his new garb demurely. "White Plume, why don't you always wear such a sensible costume? All the same," she confessed, "I like that suit of yours, and the shoes, and the helmet. There's an *appropriateness* about them. . . . Never mind. Off we go! I'll race you to the other end!"

With a gay scamper and a dive she was in the pool, and striking out towards the goal. Kellock followed her like a flash. The water, still tepid from the heat of the day, foamed round his shoulders: he flung himself forward resistlessly. Put on his mettle by her challenge,

he had been seized with a violent desire to do justice to himself in this competition and to win the race.

But he did not win it. The slight lead which she had obtained by entering the water half a second in front of him was not only not retrieved but was actually increased. She was a peerless swimmer. Although he exerted himself to his utmost he was fully a furlong behind her when she reached the end of the bath. Without a trace of exhaustion she placed her two hands on the marble edge and, in a joyous leap, lifted herself out, dripping. With delight in her face she stood and looked down at him as, abandoning the attempt, he ceased to swim; she shook her head vigorously, scattering a shower of drops from her glossy hair; she was like an active young animal, rejoicing in its own heaven-sent healthfulness.

"You're beaten, White Plume!" she sang out triumphantly. "Oh, I'm proud, proud! What fun to beat a man swimmer!" And, rising on tip-toe like a laughing statue on the brink of the pool, she dived again and rejoined him.

A spirit of madcap mischievousness seemed to have invaded her. Kellock found it infectious, and their bathe became a romp. Gone was Jewel's grave dignity: she was a girl again—

her pranks, to be sure, were less those of a girl than of some irrepressible, naughty boy on holiday. She splashed Kellock, making the water go into his mouth and eyes : in an instant they were embroiled in a mutual furious splashing-match. She veered off, defeated, and springing from the bath flew fleetly along its edge, he after her : then with an unexpected ruse, she had circled round a pillar and, with a push, toppled him into the water. A flying jump, and she was in beside him, and the frantic splashing-battle had recommenced.

Presently she was inspired to challenge him at diving. They were to dive for pebbles and see who could pick up the most, from the bottom of the bath, without coming to the surface to breathe. She threw in a handful of twenty pebbles : then she and Kellock, poised on the margin, each inhaled and dived. The bath was some seven or eight feet in depth : there was plenty of space in which to manœuvre. Kellock, steering to and fro beneath the water, his eyes searching the marble pavement for the pebbles, saw Jewel's form, shadowy and wavering, sometimes close to him and sometimes twisting suddenly away. He picked up pebble after pebble ; once he grabbed at a pebble and his hand encountered hers : she had secured

the prize an instant in front of him. In so doing, her face turned towards him, her eyes met his eyes, through the intervening vitreous film of water. A moment later, with a swerve, she had shot to the surface.

He was able to retain his breath longer than she. When he at last came up, gasping, and they compared their gains, he had thirteen pebbles and she had seven.

"Anyhow, between us we got them all," she cried. "Your lungs must be pretty sound, White Plume. Come. We've bathed long enough. The sun will soon have set. Before we lose the light I'll show you another of my favourite amusements. We'll see whether you're as good at games as you are at swimming."

She darted off, into the wide space of a corner of the court, the water streaming from her limbs and her tunic on to the pavement. Kellock followed. And in a few minutes he found himself engaged in a headlong game, played with a resilient ball and a species of small bat, the ball being hit against the wall in the manner of tennis or rackets. She was marvelously skilful in hitting the ball; her movements were lightning-like. He had always been a deft master in such pastimes; and the tremendous pace at which she played was only a

pleasure to him, and the gloriously co-ordinated action of her rapid running and striking of the ball a delight to watch and to emulate.

The disappearance of the sun brought the game to a close. Panting and flushed with excitement Jewel exclaimed: "That was wonderful! White Plume, I've never before had anyone to play that game with me, not since my father taught it to me. He used to play, but when he died there was no one left. So I have always played alone. Oh, White Plume, you can't think how I've enjoyed this."

He had enjoyed it too—incredibly. She was the best of playmates. "It's been fine." He was breathing hard.

"Warm?" she laughed. "The exercise has dried us, anyhow. Now for that postponed meal. I'm ravenously hungry, and you ought to be hungry too, White Plume."

Twilight had fallen. Above the court the sky was velvet, gemmed with stars. The bathing pool, having at last regained its calm after the turmoil of their splashings, lay like an untarnished mirror set in an ivory frame—the marble pavement.

At Jewel's suggestion Kellock carried the table of fruits into her boudoir. Here some unseen servitor had lit the lamp which hung

from the roof. It shed mellow rays from between the arabesque apertures in its metal-work. Beneath it, Kellock and Jewel, seated on the low cushioned divans, ate the fruits and eagerly discussed details of the swimming and of the game which they had played. These two activities—the swimming and the game—had formed a link between them and introduced a novel factor of comradeship: insensibly they had ceased to be strangers.

Outside the window of the room the valley had begun to be flooded with a pallid radiance; and presently, through the filigree lattice-work, the moon became visible. As he watched it slowly and majestically ascending the vault of the sky, Kellock reflected that it was incredible—incredible—that this was the same moon which had looked down upon New York.

* * * * *

That night, by the light of the said moon—for his own room boasted no lamp—he tried to write another poem.

But he failed.

The lithe figure of Jewel as, boylike and laughing, she had darted ahead of him in their race round the edge of the swimming-bath or splashed uproariously in its waters, came between him and the thoughts which he would fain have

simplified and concentrated by placing them in words upon the page. Useless to try to banish the vision which rose before his mind's eye! Better to yield to its enchantment and write another contribution to *The Wonder of Women*.

He took his pencil in hand.

"*Playmate*——"

He wrote the one word . . . then tore up the sheet of paper and threw it aside.

CHAPTER VII

SULEIMAN'S PLEASURE-HOUSE

AT dawn he and Jewel swam again together in the marble pool.

Its beauty, in the early light, was dreamlike : soon, when the sun rose above the mountain-summit, the courtyard became a chequer-board of glittering white patches between inky shadows. The heat was ferocious, almost instantaneously. Kellock and his companion emerging from the water, basked on the warm stone of the margin for a few minutes, then retired into the shade to eat.

She was grave this morning, "More 'Queen' than 'Jewel,'" as Kellock put it, rallying her on her seriousness.

"I've been thinking," she said—"wondering——"

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Tell it to me, anyway."

"When is it that you're due to start back to Gah-nung?"

"I have to meet the *Orpheus*—my steamer—off the river mouth on Sunday. To-day's Thursday. I suppose I must leave here to-morrow night."

"No, you can go down the river in twelve hours, though it takes thirty-six to come up."

"Saturday afternoon, then."

"'Saturday,' 'Thursday'! I haven't heard those names since I was a child at the mission school. The days' names don't trouble us here. The coming of the full moon is all that makes our calendar." She toyed with the fruit which she was eating. "Suppose——" She hesitated.

"Well?"

She made as though to speak, then was silent. At last she said: "Dr. Levaloir will send you back, next year, for another flask of the sacred oil."

"I don't imagine I'll be in this part of the world a year hence. I seldom linger long in one spot. Probably I'll never see Pulo again." He spoke with affected nonchalance, but it was costing him an effort—a greater effort than he could have deemed possible.

"Never come back? Oh, don't say that!"

There was a note of more than regret in her tone : she was distressed, despairing, acutely disappointed. "Don't you *like* Pulo?"

"Perhaps I'm afraid of growing to like it too well," he answered significantly.

"I thought you said you were never afraid of anything," she pouted, with a gleam of mockery.

He gazed at her. Their eyes met—his limpid blue eyes and hers with their brown depths beneath the ebony lashes. Deliberately he held her gaze, and said : "When I said I was never afraid, I was a fool."

Rich colour mantled on her olive cheeks. Her eyes fell.

"White Plume," she murmured, "if you go away I shall look and long for you to come back." Her voice steadied. "Surely Dr. Levaloir will ask you and you won't refuse. He sent Van Duysen more than once——"

"And you see the result." Kellock's comment was quiet.

"That would never happen to you," she cried——

"*What* would never happen to me?" he questioned vehemently. "What is the danger in this place? What is it that has happened to Van Duysen and the rest?"

"Better go and ask them," she retorted, with an impudent, tomboyish *moue*.

"I will," he vowed. "Van Duysen said I was to come and see him."

"Don't you think Zuaila pretty?" she asked. "You saw Zuaila, of course."

"Pretty—yes; but horribly pale."

"They're all pale. It's one of the symptoms. Even the hair bleaches in time—through every shade of red and orange to the lightest yellow. Zuaila's hair was black once, and her skin the colour of cinnamon. Now her hair is copper and her complexion at its best, a sort of porcelain. Van Duysen greatly admired Zuaila, I'm told, when he saw her; so the priests married them."

"A happy marriage, I trust!" Kellock permitted himself a shade of sarcasm.

It was lost on her.

"All marriages are happy here. We have our conventions—but, unlike the conventions of the outside world, they're adhered to by everybody."

"To put it bluntly, you mean that Van Duysen will not tire of Zuaila and Zuaila will not tire of Van Duysen."

"Quite impossible. That kind of thing doesn't happen amongst the community who inhabit Suleiman's Pleasure-House."

"No wonder you were able to persuade Van Duysen to stay."

"*I persuade him?*" She was indignant. "I never spoke to him : I never revealed myself to him at all. I inspected him as I inspected you—then left him free to go or stay as he preferred. He never saw my face or heard my voice. Ah, White Plume!"—she softened—"you don't know how my heart beat with joy when, looking at you, I saw that this was not merely another Van Duysen who had come to Pulo!"

And it was with obvious emotion that she added : "*I did* so want a friend!"

"You must be lonely here."

But, quite abruptly, her mood had changed. "Lonely? This is the most perfect place in the world, and I'm happy, happy—— But," she coaxed, "I wish you'd come back next time the doctor sends a messenger!"

"Well, I'll think about it."

"No, no. Promise! You must promise me before you leave, and then we'll write the promise down on paper, or you'll forget."

"*Forget!*" He was aghast. The premonition had begun to weigh upon him that even when he had torn himself from Pulo—he would for ever be tempted by its remembrance.

"Yes—*forget.*" She was insistent. "Some

people don't forget Pulo — Saumarez, for instance, his memory is absolutely unaffected ; but most people . . . well, anyhow, very few people have ever left Pulo, so very few have had a chance to experience the forgetfulness. Maybe it's only a tradition. They say that when a person settles here he forgets the life he's left, and *vice versa*."

"Van Duysen's memory is certainly impaired. He had the haziest recollection of Dr. Levaloir. But then Van Duysen is, I take it, suffering from the effects of the Opal waters."

"Enjoying their blessings," she corrected him. "Forgetfulness is no cause for sorrow, but rather a gift to be thankful for. That is Pulo wisdom. But to appreciate it you must stay in Pulo, not go into the toilsome outer world where it is necessary to cultivate the affliction of memory."

"At all events, I shall not forget—for I shall not bathe in the Opal waters."

"They will do you no harm," she assured him again.

He plucked up courage to ask : "Do they do *you* no harm ?"

She did not pretend to miss his drift.

"My ancestry is pure on both sides—but, as it may not be pure in its intermingling, I take no risks. I do not bathe in the Opal water,

though my father bathed and drew life from it. I shall not bathe in it, not until——”

She halted.

“Until——?”

“Until I *have* to,” she said.

There was something very sorrowful in the depths of her eyes as she resumed: “That won’t be for a long time yet, though. Years and years. Unless—at least—first of all,” she stammered, “I must find—— Oh, White Plume, don’t let’s talk about it. I’m happy, happy! And even when . . . even if the time comes when I must bathe in the Opal waters, they will give me happiness afresh and new life and joy; and Pulo will always be wonderful!”

“Are you sure?” he said earnestly. “Jewel—if I can help you in any way, I wish you’d tell me.”

She rose, and stood proudly before him. “I need no help. What do you mean? Of course I don’t need help.”

He too had risen. He bowed. “Forgive me.”

Impulsively she placed her hands in his. “I only want you to promise that you’ll come back, White Plume!”

Her small, woman’s hands, lying in his large masculine ones, seemed to plead with him:

their yearning trustfulness tugged at his heart-strings.

"I promise!" he vowed.

Their hands remained clasped for a moment.

"You've promised!" she whispered. "You've promised that if you ever go away from me——"

"I am going on Saturday," he corrected her.

"Two more days!" she rippled with a sudden return of gaiety. "Two more days, White Plume! And perhaps—no, I won't annoy you any more. Now I must leave you. Saumarez will be waiting for me in the audience-chamber, and I must play the rôle of Sultan for a while. Go and see Van Duysen and the Pleasure-House, and satisfy your curiosity—if you can. Then return, and we shall swim again, and play the racket game."

She was gone.

Passing to his room, Kellock encountered Saumarez on his way to the audience-chamber.

The half-caste regarded Kellock's tunic, and his face wrinkled into a smile.

"You wear Pulo tunic. Good!"

"I've only put it on for bathing," growled the young American, and five minutes later had changed into his white ducks and put on his solah topee helmet. Certainly he was *not*

going to call on Van Duysen wearing the Pulo tunic.

Odd, how he resented the mere idea of doing so !

He issued forth into the sunshine, garbed (with an accentuated touch of trim fastidiousness) as a Westerner. White duck trousers and jacket, soft shirt and tie, leather shoes, pith hat—no, there was no mistaking Alvin Dalroy Kellock for any of the inhabitants of Suleiman's Pleasure-House.

That abode of dubious bliss he reached in half an hour's walk.

A closer view of the Pleasure-House revealed the fact that it was in a state of lamentable disrepair. Portions of it were almost in ruins ; elsewhere, great fissures straggled across the walls, indicating the effect of past earthquake shocks. But the inhabitants who occupied its countless suites of chambers did not appear to mind the state of their dwelling-place. And in such a climate there was, perhaps, some excuse for their indolence.

" Draughts don't matter, I suppose," Kellock reflected grimly. " But if there's any rainy season, the place must leak like a sieve. I'll inquire. No harm in asking questions when you want to find things out. These folks don't

seem interested in *me*, but I'm not forbidden to be interested in *them*."

He went up to a group of the white people. They were seated, in a pavilion of the Pleasure-House, round one of their number—a woman—who had been playing on a stringed instrument.

A queer group they made. Kellock, surveying them, was intensely conscious of their "wrongness": that inexpressible *something* which had struck him in Van Duysen and Zuaila. Men and women equally were pallid, in varying degrees: some chalkily white; some almost livid, as though there were a bluish tinge in their complexions; some a pure, transparent cream; some a wan yellow. And all, like Zuaila, had carmine lips, as though here alone the red blood's pigment had persisted. With the women the effect was sometimes bizarrely charming. The women were extraordinary. The most extraordinary thing about them, to him, was their likeness—not in features, for every variety of type, Western and Oriental, from a face nearly Grecian to a face flat-nosed and African or piquantly Japanese, seemed to be represented; and their hair, sometimes worn long, sometimes cut short, was of every conceivable gradation from magenta to flaxen. Their likeness was in their age.

They all seemed to be of the same age. They all seemed to be of the age he had assigned to Zuaila—thirty. None looked older, none looked younger, except in moments of animation. None looked middle-aged or elderly, none looked girlish—or not quite. Thirty—a young thirty : that defined them.

And turning his attention to the men, Kellock saw that “round about thirty” was *their* universal age likewise. Only in their case it was not markedly a “young” thirty. It was a *passé* thirty : a thirty with gulfs between it and twenty-five.

“Can any of you speak English?” Kellock introduced himself boldly.

“I can.”

One of the men had replied, not uncourtously but with no outward show of animation.

“My name’s Kellock, and I’m an American. You are English, I judge.”

“English?” He considered. “Maybe I was English. My name’s Archer.”

“Well, Mr. Archer, I want to take the liberty to ask you a few questions. Can you spare me a minute or two?”

A flicker of amusement passed across Archer’s face. “Hours—days—weeks—months—years, if you like. But you’ll find you lose your itch

for questioning after you've settled here a bit."

"I don't intend to settle. I'm leaving here the day after to-morrow."

"Better not," Archer commented.

"There are one or two things I wanted to know," said Kellock.

"All the more reason to stay and find out."

"To begin with" — Kellock persisted — "where do all you people come from?"

"I can give you a plain answer to that. We've all forgotten."

Kellock was staggered. "You yourself don't remember England?"

"Now you mention it . . . Well, as English is my language I suppose I must have been in England. I seem to know there's a *place* called England . . ."

"An island."

"Couldn't be an island. *This* is an island, and somehow it doesn't seem to me as though England could be like this. . . ."

It was hopeless. Kellock took another tack. "Why did you settle here?"

"Don't remember—but evidently because I liked it."

"You don't want to leave?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"Excuse the question, but are you, or any of your friends, suffering from any ailment?"

"There's no suffering here, you bet your life."

"But *disease*——"

Archer's eyes narrowed. "You can't say as there's any disease if everybody's cured and nobody dies," he mumbled.

"Nobody dies?"

"We don't look like dying, do we?"

"The baths keep disease at bay—I take it that that's what you mean, Mr. Archer."

Archer assented. "They put you in fine fettle. You should try. It's an experience."

"If they're so strengthening, why is it that you people let your house tumble to bits? Why not rebuild?"

Archer shook his head.

"Well, look here: forgive my impertinence, but what do you *do* with yourselves all day long?"

"Nothing," said Archer calmly.

Nothing! Kellock's vigorous American nature was revolted. How on earth could one pass one's life doing absolutely nothing? How stave off weariness and disillusionment and self-hatred? How contrive to pass the time?

"We bathe, of course," said Archer, "and eat, and sleep, and sometimes there's some music."

"Don't you get bored?"

"'Bored' is a word I'd forgotten." Archer chuckled faintly.

Kellock gave it up.

At that moment he saw Van Duysen and Zuaila approaching, hand in hand, from the direction of the lake. He moved to meet them. Behind him, not a head had been turned to watch him go : during his colloquy with Archer no other person present had listened or otherwise paid the slightest attention.

Van Duysen gazed at him : recognition dawned slowly in his eyes.

"You're a man I met somewhere——" he said.

"Yesterday. My name's Kellock."

"Kellock. Yes, I seem to remember. You have come to live in the Pleasure-House? I am glad."

"No, I'm only paying a visit."

"Come to our room. It is cooler there."

The room which was the habitation of Van Duysen and Zuaila proved to be a vast chamber of marble, with fretted windows, and a ceiling domed in stalactite honeycomb pattern.

Ragged cushions, with frayed tassels, were thrown here and there upon the floor. They were the sole furniture. Absolutely, the room contained nothing else but these unkempt cushions. Yet the effect was neither poverty-stricken nor austere. So august were the proportions of the apartment (what matter if its marble was cracked ?), so gorgeous was the sunshine outside the window apertures and the translucency of the cool shadows within, that the home of Zuaila and Van Duysen wore an air inexpressibly rich. The adjectives "cosy," "convenient," "luxurious," "comfortable"—all the adjectives applicable to Western homes—sank into paltriness by contrast with the stark splendour of this Oriental mansion.

Kellock pictured himself living in such a room. . . .

"Lots of other rooms like this," he heard Van Duysen saying. "You could stay here, and marry—— *I'm* married. You've seen Zuaila, my wife ? Where's Zuaila ? Oh, there she is, fetching us some cushions. Pretty, isn't she ?"

Yes, she was pretty.

She came, carrying the cushions to a nook beside one of the windows, a pale slim figure in the shadowy room. Her brilliantly red lips

were like rose-petals against the cream of her face.

Pretty ? She was exquisite !

“Better stay here, and marry——” Van Duysen went on murmuring.

Kellock shuddered.

CHAPTER VIII

TREACHERY IN THE TEMPLE

HE learnt nothing during his visit to Van Duysen.

Van Duysen's vagueness was impenetrable—and his memory (if he could be said to possess any memory) so capricious as to be useless. The questions which Kellock attempted bore no result whatever. He returned to Jewel very little wiser than when he left her.

She teased him. "You don't look as though your stroll had been a profitable one, White Plume. Why that frown? Baffled curiosity?"

"There's something hateful—hateful—about those people. They're—they're *decaying*."

A startled expression appeared on her face. She gazed at him narrowly. "You don't mean to say you found out——" she began. But at his look of surprise her brow cleared. "How absurd you are, White Plume! 'Decaying'? What a horrid word!"

"Van Duysen's a wreck. And there was a fellow called Archer, an Englishman—ugh!"

"Come and swim," was her response.

And, having changed into his tunic, Kellock bathed with her, and dispelled, for the nonce, the evil impressions of the morning.

Afterwards they invaded his soul again, like a throng of evil ghosts, and voicing a doubt which had begun to arise in his mind, he said :

"When am I to receive the flask of oil which I came to fetch for Dr. Levaloir?"

She hesitated. Then, "Whenever you choose."

"Why not to-day?"

"These base suspicions" — she had seen through his request, and was speaking in a jesting key—"are not very polite. As a snub to them, you shall have the flask of sacred oil *now*."

"Where is it?"

"At the temple. We'll go there together."

Rather imperiously she strode in front of him from the court and to the palace door.

"Put these on." She gave him a pair of woven sandals, and slipped her own small feet into similar protections. "We have to cross rough ground."

"I'd rather change into my ordinary clothes, and wear shoes."

"You can't enter the temple except in the Pulo tunic. It's the law."

He conceded the point, on the "When in Rome do as the Romans" principle, and, having adjusted his sandals, followed her out into the sunshine.

She preserved a haughty silence as they walked up a gentle slope near the end of the palace. She was, he felt sure, only feigning to be offended at his request, so, taking no notice of her attitude, he began to ply her with questions.

"Our religion?"—she answered his first one—"It hasn't got a name. It's a jumble of old faiths and old traditions: Taoism and Buddhism and a dash of Mahomedanism. At the mission school they couldn't make head or tail of what I could tell them of it—and frankly I'm as much muddled as they were."

"But you've mentioned the 'law.'"

"The priests' laws are very ancient and very strict. On the other hand they are very simple and wise, and there are very few of them."

"In what way are they wise?"

"They insure the happiness of the people in the valley. The priesthood, you see, is primarily

a healing priesthood rather than a religious one. This is a tremendously old place of healing, you know. Suleiman's Pleasure-House is a thousand years old at least, and the temple dates even further back. Look at this staircase. A polish like this isn't produced in a mere century or two."

They had begun to climb a nobly broad flight of stairs, cut in the igneous rock, and the smoothness of their surface, worn by human tread or the effects of weather, or both, was indeed marvellous. Kellock's white tunic, and that of his companion, was reflected mirror-wise in each slab.

"Multitudes of people must have gone up and down here." Kellock had noticed that each step was hollowed towards its centre.

"A good many still go up and down, only nobody does anything so crazy on a fine hot day like this, White Plume."

"They don't bother to go and pray in fine weather?"

"They don't go to *pray* in any weather. They only go to bathe."

"To bathe in the temple?"

"It contains the richest Opal pool of all, and the only one which is under cover. When we have a storm, and rain falls, the Opal lakes of

the valley are diluted. Everybody takes refuge in the temple, partly for shelter but mainly to bathe. The people from the Pleasure-House *must* bathe, or—— But here we are.”

At the top of the flight of steps, on a plateau, a magnificent mosque came into view—magnificent in size rather than in ornamentation, for externally it was devoid of embellishment, devoid even of window-apertures. Its walls were fortress-like, its dome a mountain of unwrinkled plaster. To Kellock perhaps its most remarkable feature was that it was the only building which he had seen here in perfect repair. It was in an immaculate state of preservation.

Two solid metal gates, oddly reminiscent of the doors of a safety-vault in a bank, stood wide open to mark its one entrance. Within, in comparison with the glare outside, the darkness was profound. But presently his eyes accustomed themselves to the change, and he began to see that the temple was not so impenetrably black as he had supposed.

He became aware that the vast circular interior was illuminated, at a point remote from the door, by a constellation of feeble lamps, which hung in front of an altar. Above the altar a carved image brooded—a dimly-defined Buddha, or some such idol, very black, but

holding in one of its hands, rested upon its vast knee, a diminutive figure clearly intended to represent a man—a white man. The Buddha's visage was benevolent : it gazed down in pitying fashion on the relatively infantile man which it nursed.

Jewel had paused, a few yards within the door, and Kellock now heard her speaking. She had put her mouth close to his ear—not because she wished to whisper, but because, as he now learnt with startling effect, the echo induced by the acoustics of this enormous semi-globular enclosure was so loud and so confusing that it was hardly possible to distinguish words in the noise which resulted from any speech whatsoever.

“That's the symbol of the healing properties of the place.” She pointed at the Buddha.

By listening closely he could hear her, but her voice, which she had not subdued below its ordinary pitch, echoed and rumbled and re-echoed, and seemed to boom and shout and repeat itself from every quarter of the dome.

“What a weird row!” he gasped ; and promptly, as though mocking him, the sentence became magnified into an orchestra trumpeting an insane din of discords from invisible brass instruments in the air around his head.

He saw that Jewel was laughing at him.

Her laughter, mingling in the uproar created by the echoes of his exclamation, became an eldritch scream, somewhere up above him in the impenetrable depths of the roof. He put his fingers in his ears. It was intolerable—uncanny—hideous.

She stifled her amusement, and signed to him to take his fingers from his ears. Putting her hand in his she led him to the wall, to a place close to the door, where a little diamond-shaped tablet, let into the wall and flush with it, stood at rather less than his own height from the ground. Here she indicated that she wished him to remain. Then she quitted him and darted off into the shadows in the direction of the Buddha.

He watched her white-clad form flit to what seemed, in the deceptive light, an enormous distance. She became tiny, like a Tanagra figurine. Then he saw her stop and stand still at the furthest limit of the temple.

“White Plume!” A delicious, clear, musical voice called from close behind him.

He swung sharply round.

There was nobody there.

“White Plume! Listen at the tablet, White Plume!”

Then he understood.

It was the old phenomenon of the so-called Whispering Gallery. He had met it in St. Paul's in London, he had been rather contemptuous of it in the celebrated Sala de Los Secretos; but there was no doubt that while modern builders fumble empirically with the problem of acoustics, the Orientals long ago mastered some mathematical or geometrical formulæ which enabled them to construct the "whispering gallery" not by a chance but of deliberate intention. And it looked as though this Pulo temple was a case in point. That tablet, and its placing, had an air of design, like the not unsimilar angle-stones in the Sala de Los Secretos. The voice, impinging on the tablet, travelled up the terrific hollow of the elliptical roof and descended on the other side: it did not disperse itself, but arrived, unbroken and lucid, at a certain spot at the opposite end of the temple—not just any spot, but one particular spot, where, no doubt, a corresponding tablet was inserted in the wall. At this second tablet Jewel had stationed herself to "telephone" to him.

"I am listening, Jewel!" It was curious how intimate was the effect of this strange mode of converse in the semi-darkness: as though speaker and listener, invisible to each other (for each must face the wall), were intensely

near, almost touching, and profoundly alone and safe from eavesdroppers.

"It is impossible to talk, within the temple, except by means of these whispering-tablets," her voice was telling him. "Can you hear me, White Plume?"

"I hear you, Jewel."

"That is well. Our voices were made to sound so ugly by the echo."

"I hated to hear your voice sound ugly," he said.

"You looked horrified, White Plume!" she laughed. "And I—I was pleased."

"Pleased to make that disgusting noise?"

"No, pleased that you were horrified," she confessed. "White Plume!"

"Yes?"

"If there are any questions you wish to ask me about the temple, ask them now. Otherwise you'll have to wait till we go outside again. I don't want to make you angry by speaking to you while we are away from the whispering-tablets. But now that you've come here you may as well see the whole of the inside of the temple, and the Opal pool."

"Where is the Opal pool?"

"You will see it as soon as you come over here. When we have finished talking, come

over and join me here, and then we shall find a priest to fetch the flask of sacred oil."

"I haven't seen any priests yet."

"They will be here presently. There is a place behind the altar where they live, and a passage into the mountain-side to the cavern where the sacred oil is distilled."

"How do you mean—*distilled*? Have the priests some chemical process?"

"No; the Opal water's source is there. It comes very hot from the mountain—boiling. There is some volcanic action: the steam condenses—I don't understand how. The distilling is natural, and always going on, night and day for ever. The priests collect the result in special vessels. They show no one their method. All you will see is the flask which they give you."

"It won't be too big to carry away, I hope."

"Oh no, it's very small, only it is made of lead, so weighs heavily for its size. . . . White Plume!"

"Yes?"

"Are you determined to get the flask to-day?"

"Don't you wish me to have it?"

There was no response for a moment; then he heard her again. "You shall have it. I have given you my promise. But, White Plume——"

“Yes?”

“Do not forget that you have given me *your* promise : your promise to come back to Pulo. White Plume—I’d like to hear you say it to me now, once more. Will you, White Plume?”

“I promise you, Jewel, that I shall return to Pulo.”

“White Plume, you have made me very happy!” Her voice thrilled from the impassive tablet. “Come, now ; come and join me over here.”

He abandoned the tablet and moved across the vast pavement of the mosque towards her.

As he did so he had a fleeting impression that someone had peered round the corner of the door at him, and that the someone was Saumarez.

Had Saumarez followed them to the temple ? If so, why ?

He stopped and stared at the door. No one was visible. The half-caste, if he had been there, had sneaked out of sight again. The two solid metal gates, the lintel above them and the threshold below, framed a vertical oblong of sunshine so dazzling, compared with the gloom within, that the eye could hardly endure to contemplate it.

Kellock turned his back upon it, blinking

from the sheer pain on the retina, and continued towards Jewel.

She stood motionlessly by her^s tablet, watching his approach with a fixed regard. Nearing her he became cognisant of a strange light, a light other than that of the altar lamps, which pervaded this portion of the temple.

It emanated not from above but from below : its sheen came, apparently, from a space in the pavement.

In a moment he recognised its origin.

Before the altar and its brooding Buddha an irregular-shaped gap, fifteen or twenty yards at its widest, occurred in the pavement. This gap marked the presence of a miniature lagoon, contained in the natural rock of the plateau : a pool with small bays and capes : a greatly reduced version of the lake near the Suleiman Pleasure-House. And this temple pool was abrim with a similar water—Opal water. But, being in semi-darkness, its surface had a nacreous hue : it was fluorescent : it gave forth a greenish glow. Faint fumes rose from it, or rather a kind of luminous fog. The water reflected nothing : the brooding Buddha was not mirrored in it, nor were the lamp-flames. Opalescence permeated the pool and made it opaque ; and the light which transpired from

it resembled the play of summer lightning beyond the horizon line, or the strange flickerings in that electrician's toy, a vacuum-tube.

This, then, was the bath of healing. He gazed at it. It was perfectly still—a waxen sheet of untranslucent liquid. Its appearance repelled him. The green glow was . . . nasty. He moved on, and joined Jewel.

She pointed to the altar. Two figures had appeared there, evidently priests.

They were old men—the only old men whom Kellock had seen in Pulo. Their hair and beards were long and grizzled; they wore tunics; their limbs might once have been rose-wood-coloured, but were now a wrinkled and sallow brown.

Both old men made a formal obeisance to Jewel as she and Kellock approached them: a curtsy rather than a salaam. Jewel acknowledged it with a gesture, slight yet dignified—"Queen" for the moment, and in regal fashion aloof, with an aloofness which struck Kellock as quaintly felicitous, yet, in some poignant way, pathetic.

Three or four other old men appeared from behind the idol, one of them, the oldest of all, carrying in his hands a small object which Kellock took to be the flask of sacred oil.

Whether any ritual was involved in its presentation to him, he did not know. Having walked forward with Jewel he awaited the next move passively.

It was this passivity, this complete unpreparedness for any danger, which caused him to fail to draw any adverse conclusions from the fact that one of the priests had edged across to the side of the mosque, to the wall-tablet at which Jewel had stood, and was speaking and listening against it. Kellock merely noticed this, and as a simple matter of curiosity—it was amusing to watch this primitive telephone in operation—turned round and peered across the temple to the tablet at the far end. Sure enough, just within the door, and one side of him illuminated by the reflected sunshine from outside, a man was speaking at the tablet—a stunted, cringing, whitish man, a gesticulating little creature—Saumarez.

So Saumarez *had* been lurking in their track. Queer! What could he and the old priest be talking about so eagerly and furtively? Their silent gestures—for no sound reached him—struck Kellock as comical, and he was on the point of turning round again to draw Jewel's attention to them when suddenly the priest at the tablet made a signal to the priests at the

altar, Simultaneously Kellock saw Saumarez, a dwarfish gnome in the distance, dash to the doors and close them.

Their clang was like thunder: its echoes resembled the explosion of giant pieces of artillery. The concussion was deafening. Kellock was almost stunned. And before he could collect his wits he felt himself seized from behind, and pinioned by several pairs of sinewy arms. The priests had attacked him.

His first sensation was one of profound amazement. There was something almost ridiculous, to a man of his great physical strength and utter fearlessness, in the spectacle of these feeble old men pouncing on him, as practical jokers might pounce on a child in the dark to give it a fright. He stood stark still, for an instant, from sheer contemptuous surprise. Then resentment and anger surged up in him.

He whirled round, flinging off his assailants, and hitting right and left.

But they were not to be got rid of so easily as he had assumed. Moreover there were reinforcements. A score of grey-beards were now clawing and clutching at him, and no sooner had those in front been dealt with than he was tackled from behind. And, all the

time, they seemed to be pushing him backwards from the Buddha.

Backwards—he understood at last!—they were bearing him backwards in the direction of the Opal pool!

“Jewel!” he called.

But his cry was only a jangle of meaningless resonances.

He looked around him as he fought—and saw her at once.

She had shrunk back, with clasped hands, against the altar. Helpless, fascinated, she watched the *mêlée* with staring eyes, exultant when his fist dealt one of its smashing blows, anguished when the clutching priests overbore him for a moment and he yielded his foothold. He saw her lips move, but, if she had made any sound, it had only added itself to the futile echoes which continued to reverberate in the dome above their head, the echoes—pantings and the shuffling of feet and cries of pain—of their struggle towards the brim of the pool.

For there was no doubt about it: the pool was coming nearer. Kellock had made his assailants pay heavily—but they were winning. Already the Opal waters shone almost beneath his feet.

A great fury gave him strength. Like a wounded lion surrounded by jackals, he put

forth the whole of his superb muscular physique to defeat the forces which beset him. On the very edge of the pool he made a stand, his fists working like battering-rams. And the victory would have been his . . . but, snake-like, Saumarez, who had suddenly appeared, wriggled along the pool's ledge, stretched out a wizened paw, and seizing Kellock's foot, with a jerk threw him backwards off his balance.

Kellock tottered, clutched at space, had a fleeting vision of Jewel—her mouth open in a scream—and then the waters closed above him. . . .

The sensation was extraordinary. He had never before felt anything remotely resembling it. The contact, upon his skin, of the Opal liquid was sleek and caressing and warm; it might have been some bland oil, only that it had no greasiness. Pungently penetrating his whole frame (for he had involuntarily swallowed some of the water, and some had gushed up his nostrils), the perfume of violets invaded his senses—his sense of smell, his sense of taste, and even, inexplicably, his sense of touch. Yet there was no narcotic or anæsthetic effect: on the contrary he was stimulated, sharpened, clarified. So far from being confused, when he rose to the surface he was perfectly calm. He knew, with complete confidence, that he could

not drown. He knew, strangely, that his assailants had not meant him to drown. Their intention—he glimpsed it—had been quite otherwise. Moreover—this too was revealed to him—their plot against him had failed: if his guess were correct.

With a perverse satisfaction, as he drew breath, he said to himself:

“I may look a fool, floundering in this stuff, but I have the laugh of those fellows all the same. I’ve positively *enjoyed* my plunge!”

Quite placidly he swam to the edge of the pool. He was in no hurry. The water bore him on its bosom with a kindly ease: its specific gravity, he perceived, must be higher than that of spring water, higher even than that of the salt ocean. Like most tourists Kellock had, when in Palestine, tried the experiment of a dip in the Dead Sea: this Opal lake was not of so great a density as the brine of the Dead Sea, but the support it gave him was somewhat similar. He was almost sorry to bring to a close so agreeable an experience.

The water streamed from him phosphorescently as he took hold of the bank and heaved himself out. Its violet fragrance was delectable. Kellock looked about him. The priests—it was, oddly, what he expected—had disappeared;

Saumarez likewise. Where was Jewel? At once he caught sight of her, speeding across, in the dim light, towards the door; he saw her frantically struggling with its bolt. She flung it open, then, turning, wildly beckoned to him to come.

He shook his head, obdurately. No, he wasn't going to beat a retreat—not yet. He signalled to her to go to the whispering-tablet.

She understood him.

He on his part went to the other tablet: it was close to the point at which he had emerged from the lake.

“White Plume! White Plume! Come!” Her voice quivered forth beside him.

“There's nothing more to be afraid of,” he replied.

“No, no! Nothing to be afraid of, White Plume! But I'm longing to see—” she faltered—“I want to see you out in the light again.”

“Well, I'm not coming: not until I've been given that flask.”

“Go and take it. It is on the altar. No one will hinder you.”

“I'd like to see them *try*!” he said grimly.

But, in some strange way, he had no feeling of revenge. That preposterous crew of dotards seemed, now, only contemptible. He nursed no animosity against them: he did not even want

their apology—inappositely stilted word!—if they proffered it.

“Hasten, White Plume!” Jewel urged him.

He did not hasten: it was beneath his dignity to hasten. He walked rather more slowly than his wont. At the altar, lo, the flask lay by the Buddha’s foot: a queer flattish bottle, very heavy for its size, as Jewel had said. He picked it up, turned from the Buddha, and without a backward glance completed the journey from the altar to the temple door.

Jewel was awaiting him with unconcealed anxiety.

“Quick, quick!” she gasped.

“What’s the hurry? Those lunatics aren’t going to have another whack at me. I reckon some of the poor old chaps are binding up their wounds and wishing they’d let me alone.”

“That’s not it. Quick, White Plume, I want to see——” She dragged him forth into the sunshine.

“Put down the flask!”

He laid it on the step of the temple.

She took his two hands in hers, and, turning their backs upwards, examined them and his bare forearms with feverish fascination.

“The little hairs upon the wrist”—she murmured — “they always show; and you

have very fine, silky hairs on your wrists, White Plume—they would show it at once——”

She gave a relieved sigh, let his hands fall, and looked up at him. Her eyes were full of tears.

“Jewel ! You’re crying !”

“Crying for happiness, White Plume !”

“What did you expect to find on my hands ?”

“No, no ! I didn’t *expect*. But I *might* have been wrong about you. White Plume, you looked so splendid and your eyes were so clear that I was sure the Opal water could not touch you. And yet, when I saw what the priests were doing, I had an awful fear that there might be something in you I hadn’t seen : perhaps the Opal water would find it out, and you would be like the rest of those who bathe. And it came to me that I didn’t *want* you to be tested, I didn’t want to find out the truth ; I just wanted to believe in you without any test. But I couldn’t stir, I was helpless with shame and terror. Now—now I’m glad, glad ! Those hairs on your hands—oh, what brawny hands you have, White Plume !—would have changed colour : the Opal water would have bleached them instantaneously, for they are much finer than the hairs of the head. But they’re unchanged : they’re black and silky as they were before !”

"My certificate," he said ironically, "of not being a half-caste?"

"Of being free from many other taints as well as that," she responded gravely.

"Anyhow, I now know why I was lured up to the temple." His comment was dry.

"White Plume!" She was hurt. "I never dreamt of such a thing! Saumarez had said—he talked a lot yesterday and this morning about—about——" She flushed. Her olive face was burning. "I hadn't any idea that he meant to be so wicked."

"Oh, it was wicked, was it, to throw me into the Opal water? Then you admit that to some people the Opal water is harmful. Now, I don't mind betting this isn't the first time that those priests have received one of Dr. Levalloir's messengers like that. How about Van Duysen and Archer and those others? You make a mystery of this Opal water, Jewel, but I suspect that it causes that torpor and forgetfulness which I've noticed in the whites at the Pleasure-House. So when a stranger comes, the priests dope him with a douche of the stuff, and he forgets all about his errand and stays in this so-called Happy Valley."

She hung her head. "It may be. I never before came to the temple with a messenger

from Dr. Levaloir. I knew that sometimes the messenger stayed and sometimes he went away. So, if your guess is true, some of the messengers went through the Opal water scathlessly, like yourself, White Plume."

"Van Duysen made three journeys and stuck here on the fourth."

"The drug works slowly with some people, though its bleaching effect is instantaneous."

"But why do the priests *want* anybody to be numbed like that, and as a result settle here from sheer laziness?"

"They don't want it," was her surprising reply.

"What do they throw them in the water for, then?"

"They're looking for someone who's *not* affected," she explained. "They want to find a pure-blooded man. It's a test. The test has failed, not succeeded, when the victim shows the effects of the water and surrenders to the temptation to stay. The priests don't object to him staying: he will be happy like the rest. But that was not what they sought. They sought one whom the waters could not touch."

"Still I don't see what *for*."

"Him they might want to stay," she said in a low voice.

"Not a very nice manner of inducing him to do so, I reckon. They haven't given *me* a particularly genial impression of their hospitality. Do you mean to tell me, Jewel, that those old lunatics will now have the audacity to try to prevent me leaving Pulo?"

"They will try nothing of the sort—not without my sanction," she asseverated firmly. "Those others, who have gone from Pulo, went because I signified that I had no desire for them to be prevented from going. It was not my wish that they should remain. So it was with Van Duysen: it may be that he was never thrown into the pool at all (for I said, as soon as I had seen him at the first interview, that he was not pleasing to me): it may be that only on his fourth visit he was tempted to bathe in the lake, and its waters found him out and gave him forgetfulness. As for you, White Plume—you shall go. But . . ."

She lifted an eager, pleading face to his. "You have promised me to come back!"

"I have promised, Jewel. Although"—he added—"if I thought that the trick which was played on me in the temple was *your* doing, I'd have regarded myself as absolved from keeping my promise."

"White Plume, I had nothing, *nothing* to do

with it," she moaned. "Oh, believe me, White Plume! It was hateful! I hated Saumarez——"

"Saumarez was the schemer? You seem sure of that. What interest could Saumarez have in discovering the effect of the Opal water on me?"

"Saumarez is a very faithful servant to me," she muttered shamefacedly. "He has tried to persuade me before. He was overjoyed when he saw that I had revealed myself to you—but he wanted to test you; he is very careful—very faithful to me——"

"A queer way of showing his faithfulness!" Kellock was still unenlightened as to the motives which had brought about this fantastic episode.

"When I tell him you have promised to come back," she said, "he will be pleased; and I shall command him not to urge you to stay."

"He certainly won't produce the slightest effect on me if he does urge me to stay. He can urge as much as he likes. What beats me is why he should do anything of the sort."

"White Plume, you are wrathful. Forgive the foolishness of an old man who has served me and my father before me. It is because you are simple and honourable and have no vanity that you do not divine his plan. A futile plan,

maybe! Why should I not tell it to you?" Her eyes met his with beseeching candour. "Saumarez, every time Dr. Levalloir has sent a messenger here, has thought only of one possibility—that perhaps the newcomer might be of pure breed, perhaps a man not unsimilar in type to my father. Saumarez worshipped my father, and now cherishes one ambition, which cannot be satisfied from the native population here, nor, of course, from the half-castes or from anybody tainted or drugged with the Opal water. White Plume, you will not mock me, will you, if I am frank with you? Saumarez seeks a man of pure blood because he seeks a mate for me!"

It had dawned on Kellock already, even while she spoke. His tanned face took on a deeper hue. He gazed at her, standing before him, winsome and maidenly, in the tropic splendour of the sunshine. A mate for her?

With an effort he tore his eyes away. They roved the valley: he viewed its arid tracts of lava, its embankments of cinders, and its oases of verdure. Yes, it was a wonderful retreat from the world, a place of dreams, where no weariness could intrude. And she was its queen—a queen for whom it was now time to find a consort.

He drew a deep breath.

"Thank you, Jewel: thank you for telling

me. It was very sweet of you to tell me." His throat had a lump in it. "Let us return to the palace."

He picked up the flask, and together they went down the temple steps.

But when they reached the bottom Kellock halted.

"I want you to tell me something else, Jewel," he said. "If you were frightened when you saw me fall into the Opal water was it because, if I had been susceptible to it, it might have brought about, in me, some definite disease? Those bleached white people—what is it that they're suffering from?"

"I am concealing nothing from you now, White Plume. The Opal water both cures and causes the disease. It keeps alive, and makes happy, those who have already got the disease; in others, impure blooded, it gradually starts the disease while yet preventing it from killing. Yes, they are diseased, all of them, yet death is kept at bay; they never even grow older. All arrive at the same apparent age and then seem to remain there, for years and years. It is the miracle of Pulo. Do you know that some of the whites at the palace were there before my father came! Zuaila was there then, and that is fifty—sixty—seventy years ago."

"She looks thirty!"

"She will not alter—till the end comes."

"They die in the end, of course."

"Quite suddenly. There is no illness. Instantaneous death, that is all. The priests come and remove the victim, and soon all is forgotten and all are happy again."

"I hardly think Van Duysen will be happy if Zuaila dies."

"The priests would find another wife for him. He would forget Zuaila. If he dies first, another husband will be found for her. He is not the only husband she has had. There are many marriages here, and all are contented."

"But"—the idea had occurred to him for the first time—"there are no children."

She shook her head. "Those who bathe in the Opal waters are not given children. Earlier in the history of the valley it was not so; but now the disease has intensified, and these marriages are for ever unfruitful. Zuaila will never bear a child, nor will any of the other women."

"I saw babies in the native village."

"And you saw that the brown skins there are untouched with the pallor. They are pure bred, they do not bleach if they bathe. Yet if one of the men of my village is tempted and weds one of the women of the Pleasure-House, he must

go and dwell there, for he too is soon diseased like her. He may be happy, happy ; but ever afterwards he must bathe in the Opal water ; and shortly he will be white. Beginning with the fine hairs on his hands—then mottled spots of white on his body—that is how it comes ; and at last he is evenly white all over. The mottled patches are unbeautiful : this is why it is an offence against the law to take off the tunic—the signs of the disease must not be looked upon.”

“ And the disease is——?”

“ It is a strange form of ”—she faced him—“ of leprosy.”

“ Those people at the Pleasure-House are *lepers* ?” he gasped.

“ They’re lepers,” she said. “ Now, White Plume, you know the secret of the Valley of Forgetfulness.”

CHAPTER IX

BETROTHAL

KELLOCK sat on the edge of the couch in his room, his head in his hands, and pondered the information which Jewel had given him.

She had talked, on their way back to the palace, with a novel frankness. Not that she really knew much about the scientific side of the phenomena of the valley. To an inquiring mind like Kellock's her apparent acceptance of the Opal waters and the obscure maladies connected with them, her lack of disgust or even of interest, was remarkable. But the little that she *did* know she had been willing freely to impart, and the confidence in him which this outspokenness implied was at once disarming and pleasant. He and she had come nearer each other, during their return from the temple: of this he was keenly aware.

He ought, now, to have been indulging in his siesta, but he was in no mood for repose.

The thought of those lepers at the Pleasure-House haunted him. The abominable meaninglessness of their lives, as he had first judged it, sank into insignificance beside the tragedy of their fate. And there was something, to his courageous temperament, doubly detestable in the circumstance that they themselves were ignorant of this tragedy—nay, welcomed it and regarded it as a boon. Some subtle damage was inflicted, it appeared, on the tissues of the brain by the drug in the Opal water; the memory ceased to function, and for the remainder of his life the victim's faculties were limited to a mere vague physical enjoyment, which concerned itself neither with the past nor the future.

Their lives, too, were of fabulous duration. The disease progressed with inordinate slowness: having reached a certain point it could hardly be said to progress at all. Something like a century might elapse, and no outward change manifest itself. And then one day some thinned cell-wall must break down and a vital organ be reached—whereupon (as Jewel said) the priests came and carried away the corpse, and the round of dreamy egotism was renewed by the survivors. Of course the leper community was dying out, but at a very gradual pace. It occasionally gained a recruit

either from the native villages or from beyond the seas. But it was sterile: it failed to reproduce itself. . . . Which was something to be thankful for.

The temple priests, Kellock had learnt, were a monastic brotherhood. They survived to a great age—all of them were older even than the oldest leper—by reason of their use, by injection, of the distilled Opal oil. It did not prevent them growing old, it merely retarded the process abnormally. They were not diseased, nor were their memories impaired. Saumarez, similarly, was for some reason unaffected, or almost unaffected, by the Opal water. He absorbed its joys without its curse; neither his fibrous, tough body nor his cunning brain seemed to be deteriorating. He had lived in the Valley long before Jewel could remember, and, ever since she had been a child, he had looked the same. He had been married, more than once, to a woman of the Pleasure-House, and each time he had survived his wife.

The Valley marriages were monogamous, for the number of men and of women was always approximately equal. Matrimonial difficulties never cropped up, jealousy was unknown. Like other troubles, these are dependent on memory. The sapping of memory, the absence

of any need for the struggle to exist, and the illusion of well-being constantly renewed by the baths, made life at the Pleasure-House an affair—Kellock saw—of a simplicity almost impossible for the outsider to grasp. To envisage the mentality of one of these lepers, to enter, by an exercise of the imagination, into his point of view, was beyond his powers. That they thought themselves enviable he had perceived. No worries, no troubles, no preoccupations, no anxieties, no risks, no rivalry, no covetousness, no hates, no fears, no wealth, no poverty, no social inequalities, no past, no future, no loss of youth, no creeping-on of old age—it was Elysium indeed: little wonder that its inhabitants could not understand why anyone should be so foolish as to refuse to join them. Kellock's heart was filled with pity for that butterfly throng.

He wished, wished intensely, that Jewel were not in such near contact with these creatures and did not take the facts of the valley so lightly. She didn't *care*! This was what was so disconcerting. The Happy Valley was not only happy to the lotus eaters at the Pleasure-House, it was happy to her too: she too saw no further than its confines: she too was content. What a life! She was whole-

some, athletic, active, joyous, serene, intelligent, gallant and debonaire . . . yet, what a life !

And this was the life which Saumarez wished him to share with her. . . .

Kellock, as was his habit when perplexed, tackled a sheet of paper with his pencil. This was the result :

“I am ashamed of fear, and yet I know
That life unfraught with danger is not life ;
I am ashamed of sin, yet would not go
Untroubled through a world in which no strife
Arose within me from temptation's guile.
Sorrow ? Pain ? Death ?—These, *these* make life
worth while !”

But the verse did not help him. It was with a sigh of indecision that he pushed the page away amongst his bundle of poems and once more endeavoured to concentrate on the problem which, ever since he had first beheld Jewel—yes, he admitted it at last—had begun more and more to torment his every waking hour.

What of Jewel ?

He thought of the farewell he must take to-morrow. He saw her, standing, looking at him with reproachful eyes : a gracious, wistful figure, pleading with him not to leave her. He knew, knew that she was his, if he would but stay.

"I've promised to come back," he said aloud.

But when would he come back?

Of course he could come back as soon as he had been to Gah-nung.

He might even hand over the flask to Captain Sibthorpe and come back straight away. . . .

"Alvin Dalroy Kellock!" He spoke aloud again. "You don't mean to tell me you're thinking of *staying*?"

But that, exactly, was what (he knew in his inmost soul) he *was* thinking of.

He rose, and looked about him. The sun was in the west, the time had come for him to rejoin Jewel, to swim, to play the racket game, and then, in the moonlight, to eat the meal of fruits. He searched for the tunic which he must put on for the bathing—and suddenly realised that he was wearing it: he had never taken it off; he had forgotten, utterly, to make his usual prompt change into Western attire.

An omen?

It gave him pause.

Was it so easy to sink into the customs of this place?

He was vexed.

He went down to Jewel's apartments. She

was ready for him, blithely avid for a swimming contest.

"White Plume, I've been waiting!" She seemed to pulsate with the ardour of youth and health.

"Jewel," he said, "I want to ask you something: something serious. Suppose—suppose I offered to take you away from Pulo——"

"I'll never, never leave Pulo." She was positive.

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Partly because I love it, and partly, White Plume, because I must remain within reach of the Opal water in case——"

He groaned.

"Only *in case*, White Plume! It's not a bit likely, really. Still, some day, you never know—— Don't look so *sickened*, White Plume. The chances are thousands to one against my needing the Opal water."

"Then why not risk the chance, and come away?"

She shook her head.

"I ask you, Jewel," he said quietly, "to come away—with me."

Still she shook her head.

He saw that she was weeping.

"I can't, I can't go, White Plume," she sobbed.

The sight of her tears was intolerable. His fortitude melted. She looked so pathetic, so solitary, so forlorn, so appealing and lovely. He stepped forward, with outstretched arms.

She flung herself on his breast.

"White Plume! White Plume!" she sobbed.
"Stay with me, White Plume!"

He felt her trembling body against his, her arms were twined round his neck. He held her to him.

"White Plume . . ." he heard her muffled voice pleading . . . "don't you love me, White Plume?"

He put his hand on the glossy-black head of hair, and gently upturned her face to his. He bent, and his lips met hers.

"Yes, I love you, Jewel!"

Her quivering mouth lay against his mouth, seemed to cling, as though fearing to lose the full perfection of the kiss. She, woman-like, yielded to his strength; he, the man, surrendered to her soft warmth and weakness. The intoxication of her beauty penetrated him: it was summed up in the ecstasy of this caress.

"Jewel!" He whispered her name.

"White Plume!" she responded.

It was their betrothal.

CHAPTER X

THE EARTHQUAKE

THEY had had a tiff.

Jewel had said that the priests should marry them when Kellock came back—she had not again pressed him to stay—and Kellock had said that the priests might just as well marry them right away, before he left on the morrow.

This she would not hear of.

“Not till you come back, White Plume! Come as quickly as you like—the sooner you return the better I shall be pleased.” She flushed adorably.

“If it’s a case of ‘the sooner the better,’ why not *now*?” he cried, catching her hands and drawing the flushed cheek to his.

“Ah, what haste, White Plume, my dearest!” There was a new tenderness in her tone. “And three mornings ago we had not met! We hardly knew each other. Why are you so impatient, my lover?”

"Because I love you, Jewel!"

"Then a little waiting"—she was mischievous—"will be good discipline for you."

All his arguments were in vain. She was adamant. He was to go to Gah-nung and return: he might be as quick about it as he chose; but not until he had gone and returned would she become his bride.

Strange! For, at first, there was no mistaking that she had wanted him to stay.

He could do nothing against her determination—nothing but hold her in his arms and vow that his absence would be a short one.

"Afterwards—you'll be Sultan of Pulo," she said.

He did not care. He would have accepted the position of Nizam of the North Pole—with those eyes looking up at him.

* * * * *

Kellock had never before written a love-poem. And the one which he wrote that night was stilted—fantastically inadequate to the emotions which surged within him. Nevertheless he preserved it, as a memento of a great experience: its very inadequacy had, for him, a kind of meaning, though it was with a wry smile that he read it by the moon's light and gauged its feebleness and prim formality.

“Words!” he railed scornfully. And then :
“The old professor was right—a thousand times right. Verses are the safety-valve for the inexpressible.”

This was Kellock’s effort, inscribed in his usual neat pencilling :

“There is a land where reigns a queen—a queen of queens,
apart—

A land where no one else has been. The land is called
my heart.

“Rule the land, queen ; make it thine own, thy sovereignty to sway—

Issue commands, for thine alone it hastens to obey.

“In thy realm all things ill are banned, and here is
naught unclean—

So I may make this lucky land be worthy of its queen.”

On the morrow he bathed with her as the sun was rising: they splashed and scrambled and played at tag in the water, as boy and girl; and then, floating clasped in each other’s arms, their laughing lips exchanged kisses. Tired of the swimming-pool, they basked upon the marble, and ate the luscious fruits, sharing each fruit as lovers.

Kellock said : “I cannot *write* a poem, but it looks as though I could *live* one!”

Jewel did not comprehend his parable; but her smile told him that she was content. Her

teeth bit into a juicy fruit. Tomboyishly impudent, she proffered it to him with her mouth: their lips met as he accepted the gift.

"How hungry I am!" she exulted. "Oh, White Plume, how hungry I am!"

"We are hungry—for each other's love," he said.

But they talked little—for their eyes spoke all the messages which needed utterance; and kisses were the adequate and beautiful business of their lips.

Never had she seemed so lovely. The staring whiteness of the sunlit marble was a gorgeous foil for the olive tone of her limbs and face, the magnificence of this Oriental courtyard a matchless stage for the drama of their courtship. The air, which at dawn had been sharply cool, now held the languor of extreme heat: there was something somnolent in its quality, something oppressive yet delightful. The bathing pool was still, like molten glass in a crucible. Nature seemed to swoon beneath the silent onslaught of the globe of fire which hurled its warmth from the cobalt firmament.

And then, as he lay at Jewel's feet and gazed up into her eyes, Kellock beheld the shadows fade from her face and the background of marble wall go grey.

So utterly unexpected was the effect that, for the instant, he could not attribute it to any normal occurrence; it was uncanny, supernatural. But her exclamation, as she glanced up at the sky, enlightened him.

“A cloud!”

He followed her gaze.

Ominous, like a miracle evolved by some evil magician, a huge circular cloud, with edges as clear-cut as those of a balloon, had, unnoticed, glided from behind the mountain; and now its slate-coloured mass had intervened between Pulo and the sun.

“Rain!” Jewel cried.

Kellock was sufficiently familiar with the tropics to know what *that* meant. If rain were threatening it would be rain indeed, no mere shower, but a devastation.

“It is only a small cloud.” She surveyed it critically. “The rain will not last more than a few hours. But while it does last——” She shivered. “White Plume, where shall we shelter, you and I?”

They had both risen. He found that she was trembling as she clung to him—as though asking for his protection against danger.

“What is there to fear?” he said. “The storm cannot touch us, here in the palace.”

"You must help me, my lover, to be unafraid. The thunder will sound and the lightning will flash and the earth rock—and then I am frightened, frightened."

"The earth rock?"

"Nearly always there is an earthquake when that cloud appears. If it is a big earthquake, the walls crack. Sometimes a pillar or a piece of roof falls down. We all take shelter in the temple."

"An earthquake might shake down the temple too."

"It never does. Perhaps because the temple is round in shape, or built in some special way, there is never even a crack in it, however much it is shaken. There is perfect safety in the temple. But last time, when I thought I would be brave, and stayed here alone in the palace, a piece of wall tumbled near me; it might have crushed me."

Kellock pictured it, and in a flash knew what fear was. That tumbling wall—Jewel, *his* Jewel, a bruised and bleeding form pinned beneath the débris—he, to whom fear was a stranger, plumbed fear's most painful depths: fear not for himself but for his loved one.

"White Plume—will you go with me to the temple?"

He consented.

Already there were mutterings of thunder. The whole arch of heaven was overcast.

Hand in hand they ran fleetly across the intervening ground to the great stairway. Here the spectacle was extraordinary: the whole vista of grandiose steps, sombre and forbidding in the sunless atmosphere, was dotted with fugitives from the Pleasure-House, toiling upwards to their retreat: ivory-limbed men and women jostling towards the shelter above, not exactly frightened, but with an apathetic, one-idea'd expression of countenance, like drowsy, driven sheep following each other to a fresh pasture, trekking from no motive of foresight, but in a blind instinct for needed nourishment. None paid any attention to the presence of Jewel and Kellock.

Within the mosque the hubbub was hideous. The lepers, vacantly insensitive to the noise they made and to the futility of speech in such a sounding-chamber, filled the whole temple with chatterings and foolish laughter; some pairs strolled about, talking to each other though it was obvious they could not hear; others sat in parties upon the pavement, or dozed against the walls; others hastened to the little Opal lake and bathed in its flickering

waters, brooded over by the impassive Buddha. The man called Archer was lounging on its edge, with the woman whom Kellock had noticed playing the stringed instrument in the pavilion—a strangely exotic creature with oblique, Chinese eyes and doll-like feet. Van Duysen and Zuaila he had not yet caught sight of; and none of the priests were to be seen.

A procession of them, however, now issued from behind the Buddha, and with tapers on the end of poles began to light additional lamps. These lamps, suspended from the invisible ceiling by gigantically long chains, hung at intervals all round the mosque. On his previous visit Kellock had seen only the lamps in front of the altar, and the temple had consequently appeared dark. When the lamp-lighters had finished their task the entire floor of the temple was tolerably well lit: only up above, in the depths of the dome—the birthplace of a myriad clamouring echoes—the blackness remained impenetrable.

He and Jewel, having at first been carried with the tide of refugees towards the neighbourhood of the Opal lakelet, by mutual consent had found their way back, presently, to the door, and now, hand in hand, gazed forth across the valley. The rain had commenced, at first

lightly enough, so that the outline of the opposite hills remained ; then more thickly ; at last with such fierceness that the landscape was blotted out and the spectators stared at a wall of descending spears of water. The din of its impact upon the earth was terrific, but louder still was the clap of thunder which suddenly burst overhead ; and instantly, almost simultaneously, the spears of water shuddered into dazzling brilliance, each resembling an electric filament white-hot—a flash of lightning the like of which Kellock had never seen in any hemisphere.

Involuntarily he pulled Jewel back, as though from some peril, and even as he did so he felt the ground tremble. The first shock of the expected earthquake had occurred. With it, a blast of wind—a side-eddy from the simoon which must be raging in the upper strata of the atmosphere — whistled in through the door, carrying a gush of the rain, which splashed on the temple pavement like a breaking ocean wave. A second later, two of the old priests, who had been hastening forward for the purpose, swung back and bolted the metal gates, and closed with them the door, shutting out the tempest utterly.

It was a relief—yet Kellock, unreasoningly,

felt that he would have preferred to have that door left open : he did not like to be imprisoned in this nightmare trap, with its echoes above and its spectral crew of diseased folk beneath. He would rather have stood up to the invasion of the clean wind and rain than wander to and fro in this immense crepuscular cavern of horrors. How long was this captivity going to last? How soon would it be before the sun came out and he and Jewel were able to return to the palace to enjoy their last hours together before he must depart to meet the *Orpheus*? (How remote Captain Sibthorpe and the *Orpheus* seemed now! Was it conceivable that in less than twenty-four hours he would be snoozing in a ship's bunk, with ordinary sheets and blankets, listening to the thump-thump headache in the engine-room?) . . . Suppose the storm persisted so long that he couldn't get away in time? He'd *have* to go, storm or no storm. But it would be hard indeed if he and Jewel were to be baulked of the full sweetness of their *au revoir* : if they had to part in this revolting tomb instead of in sunshine outside.

Her hand tightened on his. The pavement had swayed. Now it was still again. The second earthquake tremor had passed.

A beastly place! Kellock loathed it. The lamps, disturbed by the earthquake shock, were swinging, each as a metronome. The effect was curiously sickening: while each small flame made its pendulum journey back and forth, weird shadows on the floor did likewise, only in the reverse direction. Queer sounds came from the groups of lepers, who were now mostly lying or crouching on the ground: Kellock thought at first that these were sounds of alarm, then perceived that they were laughter—the lepers, like children, were enjoying the see-saw of the lights and shadows and had only found cause for facile mirth in the heave of the pavement. Their laughter, caught up into the roof, echoed like the squabbling of monkeys in a forest: then was drowned in the half-muffled detonation of another thunder-clap outside the dome.

Kellock could have spoken to Jewel by means of the whispering-tablet, but that would have involved their temporary separation, and he was loath to part from her even for a moment. They could have penetrated the echoes' confusion by shouting at each other, mouth to ear; but somehow that idea too was repellent—it had an unseemliness, as between lovers. And the publicity of this place—he detested it, albeit he and she were not only unnoticed, but moved,

despite the crowd, in a spiritual solitude created by themselves. They were intensely alone, together. They were on a plane in which these other people simply did not exist—they were in a fourth dimension, apart. Sometimes their eyes met. Sometimes their hands exchanged a gentle pressure. It was enough.

Ugh !

Again the pavement had heaved. Quite distinctly the wave was visible, traversing it from the door to the altar, and, on its journey, knocking sideways two or three of the lepers who had risen to approach the pool. They sprawled flat, and rolled over, laughing doltishly as they bumped against each other ; and the onlooking lepers laughed also.

Kellock, though he had been braced against the wall, staggered, and Jewel nearly fell. His arm was round her instantly. She regained her balance, and leant against him for support. He could feel her heart beating, but her expression, as she looked up at him, was a wordless message : "I am unafraid with *you*, White Plume !"

Outside, the thunder rolled its myriad war-drums, and in the momentary pauses there was heard the furious tattoo of the rain.

"Bad quake. Not safe !"

A little voice suddenly spoke into Kellock's ear.

Unwittingly he had taken up his position against the whispering-tablet, and Saumarez, whom he had already noticed at the far end of the mosque, was telephoning to him.

"Do you know of any safer place?" he addressed the tablet promptly.

"*Outside*," was the voice's reply.

"That's all very well, but we'd be drowned."

"Me speak Sultan, please."

He signed to Jewel to take his place at the tablet. From the movement of her lips he saw that she had at once begun a rapid conversation in the native language.

Holding her tightly by one wrist he propped himself against the wall again, in preparation for another shock. Hardly had he done so when, with a nauseating roll, the entire temple seemed literally to rise and descend as though it had breasted a mid-Atlantic billow. It was only by a stupendous effort that Kellock retained his foothold and prevented Jewel from being thrown down. He looked about him, and saw that the lamps were swinging madly: even as he watched he saw two of them clash together, shattering each other and spilling their burning oil upon the floor—where it ran harmlessly into puddles of weak flame.

The fact that this accident had happened was

of dread significance. Hitherto these lamp pendulums had all beat the same time, they synchronised both in beat and in the direction of their swing. And now they were describing diverse arcs, each a law unto itself. Therefore the roof from which they depended must be undergoing more than one "pull": it must be stressed in several different paths simultaneously, disintegrating its own internal substance. No longer would its semi-globular shape be a guarantee of security. The most perfect curve contrived by man could not for long resist shocks which wrenched it from more than one point of the compass at one and the same time.

Saumarez was right. The temple had ceased to be safe. Better to battle through the floods outside than stay here to be buried beneath a falling roof.

Kellock tugged at Jewel's wrist. She yielded. He dragged her towards the door.

With frantic haste he seized its one great bolt and slid it back, then pushed at the twin metal gates.

They would not move. .

They were stuck fast, and a glance showed him the cause. The two stonework sides were no longer parallel. The earthquake had skewed the wall of the temple and its safe-like doors were jammed irremediably.

He threw himself upon them, he placed his shoulders against the cold metal plates and shoved with the utmost capacity of his strength. He knew it was vain. No one man could shift those gates: a score of men would not avail. Levers and jacks and scaffoldings—he had a distracted vision of the paraphernalia which would be required before those bent hinges would revolve once more and the temple door again admit the light of day.

Sweat poured from his haggard face. He was baffled. The polished metal of the door mocked him by its immobility; his onslaught had left not even a scratch upon that impregnable surface. He and Jewel could no more get out through this door than they could dig their way, with their fingers, through the stonework of the temple wall itself.

He felt Jewel pull him.

It was plain that she had perceived the situation's hopelessness. She ran back to the whispering tablet. Kellock followed.

She renewed her telephonic consultation with Saumarez.

Kellock awaited its outcome with impatience. He was itching to take action, to be doing something, he knew not what. The danger in this place was now obvious. Ordinary earth-

tremors the mosque might withstand, but this time its architecture had failed. If the gigantically substantial pylons of the door had been twisted out of the vertical, the walls around them must have been twisted too, and if the walls had been twisted, the roof might at any instant be deprived of some essential support and come smashing to the pavement.

He gazed up into the resonant depths of blackness overhead, those depths from which, at the next shock, death might avalanche down upon his loved one and himself. Impossible to penetrate that fathomless shadowland in the dome !

And yet—what was that ?

A minute silver thread zig-zagged across the darkness.

The roof had cracked.

An astounding result was immediately produced within the temple.

From a babel of reverberating discords the air suddenly sank to silence . . . no, not silence : the ear, deceived by the relief, had thought it silence . . . it was a silence broken by normal, separated sounds—the sound of the thunder and of the rain, and of a human voice.

The voice was Jewel's.

“White Plume ! What has happened ?

There is no echo in the temple. And the voice of Saumarez, which was speaking to me from the tablet, was cut short with a jerk."

"The roof has cracked. No more trick acoustics here now, with the circle broken."

"Saumarez says we can escape if we go behind the Buddha into the priests' quarters. It is forbidden—but he says we are to go in spite of the Law. He will guide us."

"Never mind the Law. This is a matter of life and death." He was already hurrying her across the pavement.

It seemed miles to the other side of the mosque, and in the middle of their rush they were sent reeling by another undulation. It was accompanied by a frantic dance of the lamps and a rending noise in the roof.

The crack had widened. Rain was lashing through it, in a veil of drops. With a puff of steam one of the lamps went out, extinguished by this falling water.

Kellock did not pause. By a miracle, neither he nor Jewel had fallen. He hurried her on to the point where Saumarez was awaiting them.

The half-caste was wringing his hands in despair.

"Temple fall ! All lost !" he gabbled. Personal fear did not seem to enter into his emotions :

he mourned only the danger to the Holy Shrine of Pulo.

Indeed, instead of leading them without delay to a place of safety, he lingered—when he had taken them to a postern near the side of the Buddha—and exasperatingly gazed back.

“No more Opal water when roof fall!” His face was grief-stricken.

“Priests pray. No good,” he added.

The whole corps of priests were, in fact, now ranged at the altar engaged in some kind of intercession. They were intent in their devotions, their solemnity a singular contrast to the demeanour of the lepers. These latter, their faculty both of memory and of foresight completely in abeyance, continued to remain in a state of placid indifference to what was happening. Some had had to shift their position owing to the influx of rain, others had been bruised by falls; but one and all they still vaguely simpered or chatted or bathed in the lakelet. Their frivolity, their unconsciousness, was at once ghastly and grotesque. Their carelessness was the tragic carelessness of babyhood—or senility.

To Kellock there was something of this same carelessness in the insane pause which Saumarez was making, and he was about to drag the

little half-caste away, when the final appalling catastrophe occurred.

With the suddenness of a cataclysm an earthquake shock of enormously increased vehemence struck the temple. The whole edifice vibrated. Kellock had once been battened under hatches in a ship, which, struck by a typhoon, lost its rudder. The sensation was like *that*. . . .

Jewel shrieked. . . .

The Buddha nodded forward . . . righted itself . . . nodded again. Its giant bulk was toppling . . . a fissure appeared at its base, then clove upward and crosswise from one of its vast feet to the knee of the other leg, with a tearing sound . . . the Buddha, with its eternally brooding expression, nodded still further . . . faltered . . . appeared to be almost sentiently straining to keep upright . . . and then, with an ear-splitting crash, uprooted itself from its foundations and fell, face downwards, upon its worshippers and upon the Opal pool.

The temple was charged with clouds of dust and flying fragments : a huge spurt of milky water leapt, in prismatic spray, from the lakelet, and filled the air with the penetrating perfume of violets. And, from beneath the immense mound of wreckage on the temple pavement,

there meandered thin red streams : the blood of the great idol's victims.

Daylight simultaneously illuminated the scene, and a burst of wind brought with it the rain's fierce deluge. The roof of the mosque yawned wide. Jagged lumps of its masonry fell, with the noise of bomb-shells. . . .

Kellock felt himself hauled through the priests' postern, and stumbled along a dimly-lit passage with Jewel and Saumarez.

Behind him, in an indescribable uproar, the entire temple had collapsed.

CHAPTER XI

BACK TO THE PALACE

THEY crouched, the three of them, in a rocky chamber in the mountain-side: one of a number of cells which composed the habitation of the priests. Immediately behind the temple, and linked with it by the corridor through which Saumarez had guided Kellock and Jewel in the nick of time, a kind of subterranean monastery had been created, its catacombs penetrating into the bowels of the hill. The tunnelling was in part artificial and in part comprised natural caves.

Kellock would have voted for a sortie at once into daylight, rain or no rain, earthquake or no earthquake; but Saumarez, whose nerve seemed momentarily shattered, would not budge. The tiny wick which floated in a bowl of oil on a shelf in the corner of the cell gave sufficient light to reveal the half-caste's state of demoralisation.

His face was the colour of paper, his teeth chattered, fits of ague shook his frame.

"Temple gone!" he kept moaning. "Pulo no more good!"

And again: "Opal water gone! We die!"

For an hour or more there was no arousing him from this slough of grief. Outside, muffled by reason of the length and convolutions of the rock gallery up which the trio had fled, the sound of the rain was still to be heard; and still at intervals the mountain shuddered with a shock of earthquake. Jewel, talking to Kellock in awed tones, told him that never before had such an earthquake been experienced upon the island, though there had been some tale of ancient prophecies to the effect that in this fashion Pulo would be destroyed.

"I'm glad I was with you when it happened," Kellock said fervently. "Now you'll *have* to come away with me."

She made no response.

But his last words penetrated to the consciousness of Saumarez.

"Yes. Come away." The dazed expression began to fade from his face. "Leave Pulo."

"That's it," said Kellock. "Keep your wits about you, Saumarez. We can fight through the rain to the palace—if the palace is still

standing—get through the tunnel and down to the river, and so to the sea. You'll end your days at Gah-nung, my friend, much more happily than at Pulo."

"Pulo no more happy!" assented Saumarez. As though the necessity to be philosophical had dawned on him, he led the way from the priests' cell.

But instead of turning to the left, in what Kellock knew to be the direction of the monastery's entrance, he swung round to the right, as if to burrow still more deeply into the mountain.

Kellock objected promptly. "We want to get out, not to go further in. The sooner we're off, the better our chance of reaching Gah-nung."

"Gah-nung no good, not if no Opal water." The half-caste was mournfully obstinate.

"What does he mean?" Kellock asked Jewel.

She spoke to Saumarez in the native language: they held a rapid colloquy.

"He says," she interpreted, "that if we are to go to Gah-nung we must take with us a flask of the Opal oil."

"But I have got a flask already. It is in my room at the palace."

"He says he knows there is another flask,

perhaps only partly full, at the place where the oil is distilled, deep in the mountain. He wants to go and save it, so that we may take it with us."

"Nonsense. We mustn't delay."

"He won't go without it."

"Then we'll go without *him*."

"We cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because he knows the way out of these caves. We should get lost."

"I could find my way out perfectly easily. We've only to follow the sound of the rain till we reach the door."

"Ah, White Plume, you do not know what our rain here is like! Nothing can live in it. We should be beaten to the earth, drowned. No, there are underground tracks wandering everywhere inside this hill, and one of them leads to the palace. I have never gone through it—no one has used it since my father's time—no one but Saumarez, who sometimes has had secret business with the priests. He can guide us."

Kellock chafed.

Jewel spoke to Saumarez, and the half-caste replied with feverish vehemence.

"He says," she explained, "that the last flask

of sacred oil must be rescued lest another earthquake shock breaks up this cave and closes the entrance."

"In which case we may be closed up inside it!" he cried. "Every time the earth trembles I've thought of *that* possibility! Jewel, you and I don't want to die just yet. There's a wonderful life for us ahead, if we can reach Gah-nung."

"Saumarez, you see, can't live without the Opal drug: that's why he wants all of it that he can lay hands on. Also"—she stammered—"do not forget, White Plume, that *I* may need it too, some day."

The half-caste, his bleared eyes flitting from Jewel to Kellock, had followed the trend of their argument. He spoke again, rapidly, despairingly.

"He says he will guide us to the palace," said Jewel, "and then come back alone and fetch the oil. The condition is that we are to promise to wait for his return. If he fails to return we are to go on to the river without him."

Kellock had perforce to be content with this bargain. He signified his agreement, and the party started at once, Saumarez carrying one of the priests' lamps to assist them.

Of that weird journey in the dungeons and

alleyways of the mountain-side Kellock retained few distinct impressions. It was like a bewildering tour through the workings of an abandoned coal-mine : turns to the right, turns to the left, scrambles up and down slippery gradients, and occasional wormings on hands and knees through holes in which his broad shoulders almost stuck. Certainly without Saumarez the path would have been impossible to find. How the half-caste retained its maze-like complexities in his head was a mystery. One thing was evident : he had traversed the route frequently—on what errands Kellock could not guess.

At a bend of the passage they came abruptly on daylight.

It entered through a round, funnel-shaped but horizontal orifice in the hillside.

“Go see,” muttered Saumarez, and hastened towards it.

Arrived at the mouth of the orifice he shook his head. “Not go out here.”

Kellock, standing at his side and gazing forth, was compelled to concur. Egress was out of the question. The rain was still falling like a solid waterfall ; anyone who stepped forth into it would immediately be swirled down the steep declivity of ashes which spread

in a precipitous fan of blackness below the cave's orifice. This, it was clear, had once been one of the lesser vent-holes of the volcano : the embankment of ashes told its tale. Even in fine weather it might have been dangerous to try to walk down or across those treacherous ashes. To dislodge a portion of them would loosen the whole mass and send them in a grimy cascade down on to the lava-bed which lay naked in the valley-bottom below. The force of the rain itself was shifting them : it alternately glued their myriad atoms together and split them into coagulated lumps, which slid ponderously out of sight into the gulf.

"Not go out there," Saumarez repeated, and turned back into the cave.

There was another route, Jewel explained for him, which led under cover the whole way to an alternative exit actually within the palace.

This, after ten minutes more of scrambling and creeping, was reached, and the party issued through a concealed door into a raised alcove behind the dais of the audience-chamber itself.

The palace, Kellock was thankful to learn, still stood, more or less intact, but the audience-chamber, on which they now looked down, was a scene of dismal disarray. The floor was

flooded, either owing to the entrance of rain through a gaping breach in the wall, or to an overflow from Jewel's swimming-bath in the neighbouring courtyard. Upon the begrimed surface of the inundation floated the cushions and embroidered coverings of the Sultan's throne, together with the inlaid octagonal table. These objects were not motionless, they slowly revolved, flotsam in a leisurely maelstrom; for the water had a current: it was escaping through the curtained entrance-portal, lapping over the step, and descending in a miniature spillway torrent on the further side.

"It's a case of wading," pronounced Kellock. "The water's not more than a couple of feet deep. We must get through, then up the stairs. I have to go to my room to fetch the flask of oil; after that we'll take shelter in the tunnel which leads through the mountain to the river."

Saumarez broke in, with a hurried gabble of speech.

Jewel interpreted. "He is going back now. He is convinced that there will be another and bigger earthquake, bringing true the prophecy about the final destruction of Pulo, and he is determined to get the last flask of oil. We are to wait for him in the tunnel—and save our-

selves without him if he has not reappeared in two hours. You are to time him by your watch."

Two hours! Kellock was loath to wait two hours. Still——

He looked at his wrist-watch. "Very well." Saumarez vanished.

Kellock had to confess that it argued not a little courage on the part of the half-caste to tackle the complications of those mountain grottos again, with the risk of being entombed at the next tremor: it was the courage of desperation—a desperation inexplicable.

"White Plume!" Jewel's hand was on his arm.

"Jewel?"

"I want"—she indicated the disorder of the room, above which they stood upon the dais—"I want to weep!"

There was a poignant simplicity in her naïve statement of the sorrow she felt at this defilement of her beautiful home.

He took her in his arms. "No time for weeping yet, Jewel," he said sadly. "I'm longing to get you away. Suppose Saumarez is right, and there is another earthquake coming?"

She acquiesced wearily "But it breaks my

heart to see my palace all horrible. . . . Let us go." And she prepared to step down off the dais into the slowly-swirling water which covered the floor below.

Kellock prevented her. "Why should you wade through that filthy stuff! I'm going to carry you."

A faint smile broke the melancholy upon her face. "You don't know how heavy I am, White Plume!"

It was delightful to see even this small return of her ordinary spirits. He smiled back at her.

"Put your arms round my neck," he ordered her. "That's right. Now interlace your fingers tightly." He bent down, slid one arm around her waist and the other beneath the back of her knees, and in a moment she was reposing like a child cradled against his heart.

"Feather-weight!" he mocked, and bent and kissed her.

She relaxed. Breathing a sigh of content, she closed her eyes.

He stepped down from the dais, and, with this precious burden in his clasp, cautiously waded through the lapping waters. They rose to the hem of his tunic, no more. Jewel could have waded safely enough, but to carry her

was a task he would not have missed. He could have wished that the distance to be traversed was a longer one. The warm embrace of her hands round his neck, the yieldingness of her pliant body in his arms, were a joy unspeakable. Reaching the door of the audience-chamber, and pushing through its curtains, he stepped forth on to comparative dryness. But—no—he wouldn't put her down. For the mere delight of it he carried her up the staircase.

At the top she opened her eyes. "How strong you are, my White Plume!"

Their lips met again.

She slipped from his arms, and stood beside him. Then she gave a cry of excitement.

"Look, look!" She ran to one of the windows.

Several of the piercings in the window's lace-like filigree (now terribly damaged by the earthquake) were filled with the familiar blue enamel—how long it seemed since Kellock had last beheld it!—the sapphire of patches of cloudless sky.

The rain had ceased.

CHAPTER XII

INTERLUDE

KELLOCK stood beside Jewel at the window. And it was as he stood thus that the first lines occurred to him of his poem, *Trustfulness*.

“In my arms I bore you, Beloved, and you lay
As though asleep upon my breast,
A child at rest.

“Long shall that memory, Beloved, with me stay—
That moment when you let me see
You trusted me.

“For, trusting me, you stole, Beloved, quite away
From out my heart all cause for tears,
All Fear of fears.”

Tranquil the valley lay outspread beneath the palace. Above, the clouds were shredding, borne upon the wings of a here unfelt and inaudible gale.

The cessation of the rain's intolerable drumming had caused, by contrast, a deathlike silence. The sun, shining forth anew, revealed,

indeed, a deathlike spectacle. For, though the valley was tranquil, it was the tranquillity of desolation. Everywhere, in every slightest hollow, were pools of mud; streaks of mud stained the hills; mud had silted into all the oases of greenery, where most of the fruit-trees were prone and battered. Cataracts of muddy water foamed over every precipice; a muddy ocean circulated sullenly round the ruins of the distant Pleasure-House—one wing of which, however, remained intact, a forlorn and jagged-edged monument of irrecoverable glories.

Smoky trails of mist began to fill the air, exhaling from the sodden ground. The return of the sun, its fierce heat unabated, had started the process of evaporation: the moisture was being drawn to the skies from which it had descended.

“Nothing can have lived through that storm,” Kellock said. “Jewel, what of your villagers?”

“All the huts in the villages will have fallen to pieces. They’re easily rebuilt.” She was inattentive. “The natives hide in holes in the ground whenever there is rain.”

He was surprised at her indifference. “But——”

She had turned to him. “White Plume, I

can't bear to see my beautiful Pulo all befouled, like this." Her cheeks were tear-stained. "And yet—and yet—it breaks my heart to leave it. I don't *want* to go away, White Plume!"

"Perhaps you'll return, some day."

"If I once leave Pulo I shall never come again." She was fatalistic.

"In Gah-nung——"

"In Gah-nung I shall die," she said with conviction.

"That is only a foolish fancy, Jewel. My dear one, there are years of happiness ahead of us. You and I will be far happier in some place where I can work for you, as a man should work for his bride."

"I wonder whether I shall ever be your bride?" she murmured thoughtfully. "Something tells me——"

She gazed at him, with mournful eyes. "I love you so, White Plume!" she said.

"If you love me you will come with me, Jewel. Trust yourself to me."

"I will trust myself to you, White Plume."

She took his hands. Lifting them, she pressed them to her lips. "I trust you, my lord."

He flushed hotly.

She did not give him time to speak.

"Now," she said, with forced gaiety, "I must make my preparations."

"Preparations?"

"You would not have me go out into the great world garbed like this?" she laughed, surveying her tunic and her bare limbs. "White Plume, I am a woman—and dress matters to me as to all women. Besides . . . you would be ashamed." She blushed.

"Have you got European clothes?" He was secretly dismayed.

She pulled a quaint grimace. "I had to wear European clothes at the mission school: a blouse and a skirt . . . horrid! And corsets . . . *me!*"

He shuddered.

"And *stockings!* . . . No, my lover, I would not show myself to you in that guise. Remember, I am Sultan of Pulo. I have no finery; but when the Sultan travels . . ." Her eyes danced. "Wait and see! My wardrobe is kept in coffers in an upper chamber: the rain will not have reached it. Go; put on your suit of white, the suit I like so much, White Plume; pack your knapsack—do not forget the flask of sacred oil; then meet me here."

He went to his room. It had been almost unaffected by the earthquake. Only the little

bath in the floor was muddy : the source of its supply had been invaded by the rain. Steam issued from the alcove ; the "hot-water tap," as he had dubbed it, was hissing and gurgling ominously. It was evident that this volcanic spring was in a state of violent ebullition. Its condition was a warning of the seismic upheavals which might—if Saumarez and his prophecy were correct—at any minute recur. So peaceful now was the whole palace that it was difficult to realise that an earthquake had passed and that another could come. Whether another was coming or not, Kellock was determined to get Jewel away from the island as expeditiously as possible. It was galling to have to delay even two hours.

He looked at his watch. Half an hour had already gone.

He changed his clothes quickly. Curious how satisfying was the return to his duck suit, his shoes, socks, and hat ! He packed his knapsack, placing the leaden flask in the bottom of it, then slung it on his back.

"White Plume !" It was Jewel's voice speaking to him from behind the door curtains as she had once spoken before.

"Jewel ! I am ready !"

She thrust the curtain aside.

It was a transformation indeed.

She was still in white, but her garment——

“I know what you’re thinking, White Plume,” she trilled. “*Trousers !*”

She wore, in fact, trousers—baggy, softly-fashioned things which came to her ankles, and were there caught in immediately above a pair of sandal-like shoes with turned-up, pointed toes. The upper part of her dress was a tunic which—except that it boasted sleeves—was not unsimilar to the one she had discarded. It was fastened round the waist by the golden snake belt; the gold scarab brooch pinned it together at the throat. Upon her head she wore a white turban, with a veil hanging from the front of it and covering her face: through its diaphanous mesh her olive complexion was dimly visible, and the glint of her dusky eyes.

“Aren’t they *pretty* trousers, White Plume?” she asked, with mock anxiety.

He could not but enter into her mood.

“What I *don’t* like is the veil.”

She threw back the veil.

“That was a very nice speech, White Plume!” She put up her lips to be kissed.

Then: “Have you seen these?” She drew

his attention to a rope of pearls which hung round her neck.

He fingered them. "A magnificent necklace, Jewel. It must be worth a fortune."

"The only treasure I possess," she told him. "Perhaps some day we'll have to—what do you call it?" she bubbled—"pawn it."

"Not as long as I've got a pair of arms to earn our living."

She pouted waywardly. "I don't think I shall like the big world where people have to earn their living."

"It's the worth-while world, all the same," he assured her.

"Well"—she conceded—"if White Plume is happy there, I shall be happy too."

But presently a dark thought clouded her gaiety. "Yet I'm afraid, afraid, White Plume."

"Afraid—what of?"

"Afraid"—she came back to her old dread—"afraid to leave the Opal water . . . in case . . ."

He sealed her mouth with a kiss of reassurance.

But she would not be comforted.

And suddenly she broke out : "White Plume, I will go with you to the river : Saumarez and I will sail down the river with you to the sea.

By that time, if there has been no further earthquake, I—I shall want to return. Yes; you will leave on the steamer, and I shall come back to the Happy Valley with Saumarez. When you have been to Gah-nung——”

Her plan was broken in upon by a sudden rumble. The room quivered.

Another series of earthquake shocks had commenced.

CHAPTER XIII

VIALS OF WRATH

THE earthquake which finally devastated the island of the Happy Valley was one of the most terrible known in the annals of the Archipelago.

Yet its development was singularly gradual. It was an affair not of minutes but of hours.

Kellock and Jewel, sheltering in the mouth of the tunnel which was their sole road to freedom, experienced, during their promised wait for Saumarez, long intervals when the tremors appeared to have totally ceased. While these intervals lasted, hope rose afresh: it was impossible to believe that danger threatened. And then, with hideous rumblings, the mountain would once more be shaken to its foundations, and the row of windows in the entrance-hall of the palace, at which they gazed from the surer foundation of their retreat, would tilt and heave, the thin tracery of the lace-work snapping, and

clattering inwards to the floor in morsels of débris.

It was a long-drawn ordeal of anxiety for Kellock. Having given his promise to the half-caste, he felt bound in honour to wait until the two hours had elapsed. But his determination was torn by the presence of Jewel. That *she* should be endangered by this delay——

Of course she might go on ahead, through the tunnel . . .

He shrank from proposing such a plan. He did not want to lose sight of her.

And when, after a nerve-racking sway and surge, he suggested to her that she should flee while he kept watch for Saumarez, she would not hear of it.

"I stay with my Lord White Plume," was her firm decision.

In spite of his incertitude, he was thankful—and proud.

He looked at his watch. "Less than an hour, now."

Less than an hour! He was acutely conscious of the fact that even "less than an hour" might make all the difference between life and death for himself and (a more piercing thought) for the woman he loved.

Here, in the arched entrance to the tunnel,

with solid rock beneath their feet and above their heads, they were admittedly safer than out in the palace. It, like the temple, had withstood many seismic assaults of the past; and, like the temple, might prove, to-day, a grave for anyone who trusted to its shelter. That final scene in the temple . . . Kellock felt that if he allowed himself to dwell on its ghastliness it would break his fortitude. At all costs he must retain his presence of mind. He would need every ounce of his coolness if he and Jewel were to live to see another dawn. She was dependent on him absolutely. The thought braced him.

They stood, he and she, just within the mouth of the tunnel. It opened into that handsome upper room of the palace which, to him, was the latter's entrance-hall: the hall whose aspect had so astonished him when it had burst on his view at his arrival. The aspect of the hall, as he now gazed forth at it, was not much altered, except for the particles of broken lattice-work spattered upon the floor. The windows framed, in their chipped and splintered apertures, a cerulean blue: the sun poured through them dazzlingly. Only, now and then, they danced a hideous jig . . . the sunshine patches and the intervening shadows swam sickeningly . . .

and another of the earthquake fiend's huge agonies had come and gone.

Of course, as he had observed on the occasion of his first walk in the valley, the palace was erected with great firmness against the mountain-side: its back was welded to the cliff. The building *might* hold. After all, a portion even of the comparatively flimsy Pleasure-House had contrived, somehow, to remain standing. . . .

A thick pillar of smoke became visible through one of the windows, rising perpendicularly athwart the distant background of blue.

"Something on fire?" he queried. It seemed impossible that anything could burn after such a drenching.

"A volcano," said Jewel: "one of the volcanoes amongst the hills on the other side of the valley."

He could not resist the temptation to make a hurried sortie to a window.

She was right. The smoke, which mounted in a vertical column but was already spreading umbrella-wise over the blue, was emitted from one of the skyline peaks. He observed it with relief: it was conceivable that the seismic pressure had found a valve, and would lessen accordingly. A volcano in eruption may be a far less dangerous neighbour than a volcano

which, so to speak, is trying to erupt but failing. As long as it was only so distant a volcano—six or seven miles off, at a guess——

Then he saw that this was not the only pillar of smoke. From a mound adjacent to the Pleasure-House a second pillar was ascending, oily and livid. And almost immediately he caught sight of a third, and a fourth, and a fifth. All round the circuit of the valley the labouring hills were giving birth to these cyclopean spectres of black, like genii emerging from hell and joining hands to shut out the light of heaven.

The sun dimmed, became a ball of red, disappeared. A darkness as of approaching night began to thicken over Pulo. Kellock, with the sunshine gone, perceived that the columns of smoke which he had thought to be black were illuminated by an orange glow, which pulsed like the reflection from a locomotive's furnace.

An ominous rumble and tremor sent him back from the window to rejoin Jewel.

"It looks as though the second part of the entertainment were about to commence," he said, with feigned flippancy; "and it may be more spectacular than the first. I wish Saumarez would hurry up. Only half an hour left now. But if the stuff in these volcanoes

boils over . . . I've seen a volcano in action, and it's a fine sight—if you're a very, very long way off. These volcanoes are a trifle too near for my taste. But this darkness will be a nuisance. No romantic moon for our voyage down the river, I'm afraid. We'll have an exciting trip."

He continued to talk, lightly, not only to keep up Jewel's spirits but also his own. She had slid her arm through his as though to signify that she claimed his support. But she was not trembling; she seemed singularly undismayed. When she had said, "I stay with my Lord White Plume," she summed up the faith she reposed in him, a faith which banished fear.

Ten more minutes passed. Outside the windows the smoke-laden sky was illuminated by flashes of crimson; each flash was accompanied by a sonorous boom, as though a far-off cannon had been discharged. The simile was close, for now, from time to time, blazing fragments of scorixæ shot towards the zenith like shells, visible for an instant as they traversed a window-gap. The most distant of the volcanoes was at last in active eruption.

The earth shook continuously. A monstrous cleft appeared in the wall of the palace: Jewel and Kellock could descry a section of the valley

through it. Something like a golden serpent was wriggling down the opposite hillside towards the region of the Pleasure-House. It was a runnel of molten lava.

A strong smell of sulphur began to permeate the air. Kellock remembered chemistry lectures at college, and the "rotten egg" trick with sulphuretted hydrogen. "Stinks" had been funny then : they were less funny now.

He examined his wrist-watch. There was sufficient light to discern its face. Its hands had crawled. There were still fifteen minutes to go.

Fifteen interminable minutes ! Kellock could hardly endure the prospect.

But before the first sixty of those nine hundred fateful seconds had elapsed, he had other things to think about.

The now incessant earth-tremors suddenly gathered themselves together into one gigantic fury of conflicting waves, which appeared to rush together and collide, their focus-point being the palace. Its thick walls tore, right and left, like so much parchment ; the rents ran hither and thither in slanting fissures ; portions of the roof came crunching down ; the walls bulged outward, swung for a moment, and then fell in a sliding, dusty wreck. Jewel and

Kellock, in the tunnel's archway, instead of looking forth into the entrance-hall, saw naught but gaping space: they gazed out across a tangle of ruins on to the open valley.

"White Plume! My palace!" She gave one moan.

Nothing remained of her home but a few heaps of rubbish.

She burst into tears.

Endeavouring, as best he might, to soothe her, Kellock, though grieving for her loss, was profoundly thankful that they themselves had not been engulfed. The mountain had been shaken frightfully—it was still shaking; but its great bulk was no mere artificial fabric like the palace: the tunnel's vault held firm; not so much as a speck of its rock had been dislodged. Here they were safe. For how long? How long would their road to the outer world remain traversable?

"If Saumarez meant to come out through that door into the audience-chamber——" he began.

It was obvious that there was now no such place as the audience-chamber. The half-caste, as likely as not, was buried in the downfall.

And then, suddenly, he saw Saumarez.

The little man was on the mountain-side, at

a distance of three or four hundred paces, in the direction of the temple. He had emerged, like a frightened rabbit, from a small round hole—that same funnel orifice to which he and his two companions had come but a short time ago and from which they had spied forth upon the fan-shaped declivity of ashes. Down and across this landslide of ashes he was running and striding, his feet sinking at each step into the unstable mass, so that it tobogganed with him, and for every yard he jumped he was carried twenty yards onwards. Five hundred feet below, at the side of what had once been Jewel's palace, the slope of ashes ceased and a flat space of bare lava intervened. Towards this area of comparative safety Saumarez was aiming, in a long diagonal.

Again and again the ashes almost engulfed him. He sank up to his knees ; sometimes, sinking to his middle, he held aloft, as though to protect it from damage, a small object : evidently the second flask of sacred oil. A myriad minute cinders were dislodged every time he moved. But he did not pause ; he ploughed forward down the treacherous black quicksand without an instant's rest to draw breath.

It was a strange drama. Kellock, unable to

help, watched it with morbid excitement. The twilight which hung over the valley was luridly lit up with flashes. The entire ring of volcanoes were now vomiting forth flames and scorïæ and streams of red-hot lava. The earth-tremors had, for the moment, died away; but the air was full of the roar of continuous explosions. Armageddon might have been in progress—an armageddon of unthinkably grandiose field-pieces. Overhead, the pall of smoke suddenly turned to blood-colour. Every object within sight was suffused by it; even the few remaining green trees looked red. A fresh and larger overflow of liquefied mineral matter had spilt from some new vent, and was viscidly finding its way down the crater's side.

"If it were not so cruel," Kellock heard Jewel's voice whisper, "it would be very beautiful."

It was true. The spectacle, but for its dread significance, would have been sublime.

"Poor Saumarez!" she added. "My old friend and faithful servant! I don't like to look on while he struggles for life. . . . *Ah!*"

The half-caste had disappeared.

Within but a few steps of the lower edge of the ash-slide, his doom had overtaken him. The great embankment of loose ashes, disturbed

by his progress, had started to move . . . faster . . . faster . . . rolling over upon itself and gaining in impetus. Its victim, carried forward, was an atom in a cataract. He sank to his knees, he sank to his waist, he sank to his chest. The ashes whirled him onward. The onlookers saw him fling his hands upward and vanish.

Thousands of tons of ashes, still damp and sodden from the rain, surged down on to the lava-bed at the base of the embankment, and there piled themselves.

Somewhere beneath that huge black mound lay the body of Saumarez the half-breed.

But, just before the momentum of the ash-slide had interred him in its awful sepulchre, something small and flat and oblong had escaped from his uplifted hand—the precious flask, the flask for which he had lain down his life. And this flask, flung ahead by his dying gesture, had landed obliquely on the lava-bed and skated across its smooth surface almost to the ruins of the palace itself. There it lay, far beyond the point where the last fringe of the ashes had come to rest, a memento of its owner's desperate rashness.

Jewel seemed petrified. She uttered no word. One great sob shook her.

It was no time for speech. Kellock's sole thought was to get away as quickly as possible. To attempt to exhume Saumarez was useless; even if those countless tons of slag and clinker could be removed, it would be wasted labour: the half-caste must have been crushed to death instantaneously. There was therefore now no object in delaying.

"The third member of our party will never leave Pulo," he said quietly. "Come, Jewel. Let us be off at once."

To his astonishment she hung back.

"White Plume, I'm frightened to stay; but I'm more frightened to go."

"Then leave it to me. Trust me, Jewel, that it is the wisest thing. Take my hand. I will lead you."

She still lingered. "The earthquake may pass, White Plume——"

"Even if it does pass, the place is devastated."

"But the Opal lake near the Pleasure-House will still——"

"*What!*" He was astounded that she should have come back again to this obsession of the Opal water.

"At Gah-nung I shall die, White Plume. Here there is long life for me, even if I have no

palace to live in. When the time comes for me to need the Opal water——”

“Jewel!” he groaned. “How can you talk like that! You’re unstrung, hysterical. Why do you dwell on this fate which you think is hanging over you? It’s pure imagination.”

She shook her head. “I am of mixed parentage. Some escape the curse, but most fall beneath it, and then their only salvation is the healing water.”

He had an inspiration. “Suppose, years hence—if ever anything does go wrong with you: suppose you’re taken ill”—he could not bring himself to name the dread plague—“Dr. Levaloir will cure you. I can promise you that he can and will do that, even if only in gratitude to your father for the supply of sacred oil, and to me for bringing the last flask.”

“The last flask!” His words riveted her attention. “*The last flask!* White Plume”—she pointed down to the lava-bed beyond the ruins below them—“the last flask lies *there*.”

“Broken, probably,” he said.

“The flasks are lead. They cannot break. White Plume, you must go down and bring for me that last flask. It contains . . . *life*. The other flask, the one you have already got,

belongs to Dr. Levaloir. *That* one belongs now to us: it is yours and mine, our precious security against the future. Bring it, bring it, White Plume, and I will go with you wherever you wish."

There was nothing for it but to obey her whim.

He surveyed the ruins. Yes—he could scramble down. There was no great risk involved, except in so far as any delay was in itself a risk. But for her insistence he would never have dreamt of descending to fetch that second flask, however great its value. The mountains were now flowing with lava; several of the streams were so close to the palace that their heat could be felt. The odour of smoke and sulphur already made breathing difficult. Still—if she so obstinately wished him to go——

He turned to her.

"I'm going, Jewel. But—it's not impossible—something may happen even on that short trip. Those lava-streams are uncomfortably near. In case I make a slip, in case I don't come back——" He took her in his arms.

She clung to him in a passion of remorse and love. "I wouldn't send you if it wasn't that we *must* have that last flask," she wept.

They kissed.

He tore himself free from her embrace, and began, very cautiously, to lower himself down the jagged walls of the palace ruin.

She watched him, with parted lips, tears streaming down her face.

But she did not call him back.

Once, only, she screamed in terror. He had slipped, and a knotted accumulation of masonry had crumbled down alongside of him. He was up again at once, and edging himself gingerly onward beneath the flickering light from the lava-streaked hillsides and the blood-hued sky. His agile muscularity, the poise and firmness of his athletic limbs, stood him in good stead.

Now he was at the bottom of the ruin. The flask lay at his feet. He picked it up. Jewel was right. It had sustained no damage.

He thrust it into his pocket, wiped the sweat from his brow, and prepared to ascend again. He was perspiring, not because of the exertion nor by reason of fear, but because of the scalding blasts of heat from the nearest of the lava-streams. Its foremost rivulet, ruby red and advancing with a strange bellying motion, like some curdled rope of fire, had almost reached the remains of the palace. The fumes from it were suffocating. But its approach was slower than his retreat. Gasping and coughing, he climbed

from point to point of the ruins. In less time than it had taken him to go down he was up again in the arched mouth of the tunnel.

“White Plume, you are brave!” His reward was the admiration in Jewel’s eyes. “I will go now with my lord to the ends of the earth.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT

THE tunnel trip was perforce slow. There was no light whatever. Kellock had to conduct Jewel by feeling his way with his hand along the wall; only a cautious pace was practicable. The invisible wall, dry to the touch, at last began to feel dewy. He knew then that they were nearing the exit—were nearing that other and moister climate which characterised the external aspect of the mountain slope.

They emerged at last on the ledge at the top of the pyramid-like steps.

Here there was a little more light than he had dared to hope for. The smoke-pall, which had been opaque over the basin of the Happy Valley, was not yet spread so thickly on that part of the sky which was now above the travellers' heads. No sun was visible, but the dusk in which they moved was the dusk of a London

“pea-soup” winter afternoon rather than—as heretofore—the blackness of night.

But, though the illumination was wintry, the atmosphere was not. Its heat was terrible—damp and enervating. Jewel panted audibly as Kellock helped her down from step to step of the mammoth staircase.

“I can’t breathe, White Plume!” she gasped. “I’d forgotten that the outer world was like this.”

“It isn’t,” he assured her, smiling. “Wait till you taste the sea-breezes——!”

Her answering smile was wan.

The jungle which hedged in the stone pathway still dripped and oozed unwholesomely, as when Kellock had first traversed it. Jewel leaned heavily upon his arm. All the lyric grace and lilt seemed to have gone from her body. She looked tired—and it came to Kellock that never once, not even after her swimming or the racket game, had he ever seen her display the smallest kind of physical tiredness. This abrupt plunge into moist heat had sapped her vigour with disconcerting rapidity.

“Why do I feel all funny and weak?” she demanded. “I never remember wavering about like this before.”

He explained to her, with solicitude, that

the symptoms which so surprised her were quite natural ones.

“ But you’re as strong as ever, White Plume !”

He was not, really ; but he let her think he was. It would never do to confess to the fatigue which was invading him : he could not afford to give way to it until they were secure on board the *Orpheus*. How he longed to behold that ugly old *Orpheus* and to see once more Captain Sibthorpe’s ruffianly unshaven countenance and its eternal cheroot !

Long before they came in sight of the river, Kellock had realised, by the roar which reverberated from it, that it was in flood. The lagoon where the boathouse had stood was a turgid lake, many feet above its former level and daubed with bubbles and clots of dirt-stained froth. Its waters were mud-coloured, but, oddly, were smeared here and there with patches of milky opalescence. Through some subterranean channel the river no doubt came from the Happy Valley, and was therefore augmented by contributions from the Pleasure-House lake and the other Opal water sources. These, their confines burst by the earthquake, or overflowing after the rain, were the origin of those strange silken scourings, which, in the dusk, glimmered with a faint and eerie radiance.

Kellock's chief concern, however, was with the boathouse. An exclamation of dismay escaped his lips when he saw that neither its thatched roof nor the pier of stakes was visible. Both had been carried away by the spate—and, with them, the sampans.

No. One sampan remained—the largest and heaviest: the carved and painted vessel which he had recognised as the Sultan's state barge. Grotesquely tilted, the Buddha-head prow crowned drunkenly with garlands of flowering creepers, it had somehow enmeshed itself in the branches of an overhanging tree, and there lolled, in a semi-swamped condition, the stream tugging vainly at its moorings.

"We shall travel in style after all," chuckled Kellock. "Your own boat is the only one which has been civil enough to await its mistress." He set to work to disentangle it.

The tree-branches broke fairly easily, but the creepers were as tough as steel. For more than an hour he wrestled with them, in the almost unendurable heat. Jewel could give him no help. She had sunk down, a little distance up the path; her eyes watched him stonily: she appeared to have reached the limit of her strength. Once indeed she called to him: "It is no use, White Plume! Why fight so savagely?"

The gods are against us ; they do not wish us to leave Pulo. Let us return to what is left of the Happy Valley where, even if there is danger, we can at least breathe."

He would not listen to her—though, with all his powers ebbing, it was a temptation to do so. The gods *were* against him, against his taking Jewel away, against his promised return to Gah-nung. It would be easier to give in, to retreat, with her, to abandon the lure of the outer world——

He *wouldn't* give in. He set his teeth. He *wouldn't* give in.

And presently the barge was free.

It floated, though half awash with water. With his arms in an absurdly affectionate embrace of the prow which formed the Buddha-head's neck he coaxed and edged it round the bank to the cleared space where the boathouse had been. To bale out the roomy craft would take an eternity. His only implement, now he came to think of it, was his hat. Useless ! With a last tremendous effort he hauled the big sampan up the beach and heaved it over on its side to drain. The water gushed from it, leaving it empty. Soon, Kellock knew, the heat would dry its interior. While it was drying he would rest. He *must* rest.

He went and lay down, exhausted, beside Jewel. She took his head upon her knees.

"The white plume!" she whispered, smoothing his silver lock from his brow with her fingers. "How strong you have been for me to-day, my lord."

She added in an undertone, "And I can never repay you!"

"You can repay me by being brave and beautiful, Queen."

"Suppose I were *not* beautiful?" she sighed. "You will be beautiful always in my sight, White Plume; but I—I may change——" Her voice wavered and fell.

The darkness was deepening. His watch told him that the sun should still be above the horizon, but the smoke-pall had thickened. Its canopy was refulgent with meteoric flickerings.

He roused himself. "Time to embark."

She pressed a kiss upon his forehead. "I am ready, White Plume."

He slid the sampan into the water. One of its paddles had survived the flood. With this he armed himself.

Jewel stepped on board. Kellock followed her, and pushed off.

A minute later he realised that the paddle was useless.

The current of the river seized the sampan as it might have seized a twig, and whirled it seaward through the aisles of the tropic jungle. Steering was impossible; the paddle's strokes influenced their headlong course not an atom. Sometimes stern first, sometimes sideways, sometimes bow first, the boat was borne upon the resistless flood, in dizzy spirals and wild swoops, like a cork on the Niagara rapids.

Kellock, unable even to maintain a standing posture, threw down his paddle, and, creeping to the stern of the boat, joined Jewel. He collapsed beside her. Dimly he could discern her in the darkness. Her eyes were shut. She opened them for a moment. Her hand wearily sought his.

"White Plume!" He heard her breathe his name. Her eyelids drooped again.

Their hands exchanged a faint pressure.

It was almost as though they were bidding each other farewell.

An overwhelming sense of fatigue had gripped Kellock. His limbs ached intolerably. He was faint and overtaxed with the burden of the heat. Lying in utter lassitude he gazed forth at the sky, which palpitated with saffron and purple; it circled maddeningly with the boat's gyrations. Sometimes the jungle loomed beside

him ; sometimes the sampan rolled in the trough of the current and he had a glimpse of the swarthy river itself, and its striæ of pallid opalescence. His eyes throbbed. He closed them.

With a promptitude which would have seemed to him incredible had he been aware of it, he was asleep.

CHAPTER XV

RENUNCIATION

“WHITE PLUME!”

His senses began to return to him, as though from the profound depths of a voluptuous Nirvana.

“Awaken, my Lord White Plume!”

Consciousness came.

“White Plume!”

It was Jewel's voice.

“Jewel!” He was wide awake. He saw her, and—oh, beatific vision!—he saw the sun.

Day had dawned.

He sat up.

The sampan floated upon the level ocean, with a placid steadiness which was a delicious contrast to its headlong twirlings of last night. What wild adventures and escapes it had experienced during the night Kellock knew not: his long sleep had spared him those horrors. That the craft in which he and Jewel had been thus

miraculously conveyed to their goal had run some strange gauntlets in its coastward career was plain: there must have been more than one collision, judging by the deep scores and scratches on its paint. And some obstacle—presumably an overhanging branch or tree-root—had taken toll of its prow: the Buddha-head was gone, smashed off at the neck. No matter! The boat still rode the waters bravely. And its passengers were unharmed.

Kellock stretched himself luxuriously. His sleep had given him back his strength. He breathed anew. The sun's rays were a benison.

“Jewel, it's good to be alive!”

“It is good to be alive, my Lord White Plume,” she assented.

Something in her tone struck his attention. “You are still tired. Hungry too, of course.” He kissed her. “My Jewel shall breakfast on chocolate. It's the best I can do for her.”

Two tablets of chocolate were in his knapsack. He produced them. “This'll keep us going till the excellent Sibthorpe comes to our rescue.”

While he ate, he surveyed the horizon. Seawards there was nothing visible but the vast floor of greenish-blue. The water in the immediate neighbourhood of the sampan was

muddy; but this discoloration was local; further off the sea displayed its usual pure tints. Following the discoloration's path the eye was led to the island, which lay at a mile's distance. A huge outpour of tawny smoke billowed from the hills in the island's centre; wind must be driving it, for it did not spread, it streamed away to the south so rapidly and ceaselessly that it gave the observer the quaint illusion that the land was in motion, steaming vigorously across the sea. The sun, still low—for the dawn had only just come—was not quite over the island: it was thus not obscured by the smoke.

"The volcanoes are still at it, I see," Kellock observed.

"Before dawn, when it was dark, the smoke looked all copper-coloured," said Jewel. "And burning stuff was thrown up into the air. Once I saw lava overflow the hilltop into the jungle on this side."

"You've not slept?"

"I slept a little," she said wearily. "I awoke long before you did, White Plume. It was awful. The boat rushed and tossed—everything spun round us—I was terrified. Then when at last we came out into this blessed peace I lay and watched the fires of the volcano—and

knew I was watching the destruction of my beautiful Pulo."

He encircled her with his arm; but he knew that it was impossible for him to condole with her in her great grief.

"Anyhow," he said, "we're safe, you and I, Jewel. Let's look forward to the happiness in store instead of backward at the sorrow of loss."

She buried her face on his shoulder. "If only I could do that, White Plume; if only I could do that!"

"You *can*." He fondled her. "My dear one, do you think I don't realise——? I want to share your grief, and help you to bear it. That's what I'm *for*. But I want to share happiness also. You and I are going to be very, very happy, Jewel. You and I together——"

She clutched his arm. "I can't bear it, White Plume! I loved you so!"

"And you still love me, don't you?" He patted her head. It was evident that she was spent; he must humour her and comfort her as one would comfort a child.

"If we had been going to live in the Happy Valley——" she gulped.

The Happy Valley! He mused at his recollections of the Happy Valley. Suppose there had been no earthquake; suppose, after his

trip to Gah-nung, he *had* returned to the Happy Valley and become (incongruous thought!) Sultan of Pulo? Suppose he and Jewel had lived together, bride and bridegroom, in that enchanted palace of hers, basking in the sunshine, bathing, playing the racket game, roaming the hills. . . .

How long would it have been, for him, the "Happy" Valley?

Of course he could have tried to institute reforms. . . .

He smiled at the very word.

No; happiness would only have been possible in the Happy Valley if he had surrendered to its bondage. Lotus Land is not Lotus Land for one who tries to inhabit it and retain his conscience. The natives of Pulo no doubt managed to compromise, somehow: they were the workers, the slothful sybarites of the Pleasure-House were the drones. Between the two came Jewel. . . .

It would have been marvellously peaceful and sweet, the life with Jewel in the Happy Valley! No more anxieties, no more strife. . . .

He was thankful, now, that circumstances had forced them to flee. Yes, he admitted that he had been tempted. Looking back, he was ashamed at his own weakness. For, after all,

had he not already received sufficient warning? Had he not already once known the slavery of a life too free from struggle? In those long-ago days in New York, when he was rich, he had imagined himself happy. He had no work to do; other men toiled to maintain him in idleness. Everything desirable was his: he and his fellow-drones moved in an easy circle of delights: like the Pulo lepers they adhered to certain facile conventions and hid what was ugly—forgot it, ignored it. The life which had offered itself to him in the Happy Valley had only been another version of the life which riches once gave him; and it had the same drawback—it was slavery.

And Jewel herself was one of the slaves.

Thank God he had been able to rescue her! Kellock knew that, for her, the first pangs of freedom would hurt: he himself had been hurt, at first, when his millions were taken from him. He must be very gentle with her. His love must soften her pain: he must make it, to her, something infinitely more precious than what she had lost. He must be wise, wise—wise for the two of them. He gazed across her bowed head at the sea, which typified, for him, the escape into a wider, more strenuous world, and vowed to win her to a freedom as fine as the

freedom which was his own ideal and to which (he now saw) the lure of her beauty had almost made him false.

Strange that she should be so sad ! Surely the wonder of the sea and the dawn might have revived her ?

"Jewel !" he said, "why are you weeping?"

"I am not weeping, my Lord White Plume. My heart is too heavy for tears." She roused herself. Her bosom heaved, but her eyes were dry.

"Our love for each other——" he began.

"White Plume, had we lived in the Happy Valley, you and I, our love might still have compensated for—for——" she faltered. "I could have won you——"

"You *have* won me, my Queen !"

"I could have won you to the ways of Pulo. My love for you was so great that it blinded me to the wickedness of what I was doing. It was all a dream—it would have become more and more a dream—in the end we should have dreamt the same dream as the dwellers in the Pleasure-House, and known the same happiness. To that I should have won my White Plume."

"And now *I* have won you to a different life, Jewel."

She was not listening.

"All the time in my soul I knew that it was a wickedness, and that in enticing White Plume to be my mate I was dragging him down. White Plume, I am no mate for you. Do you think I don't know? When I was at the mission school I had a glimpse of what is called civilisation, and looking back I know that I have relapsed into savagery. No, don't speak! I am a savage, not a woman of your kind. I learned to read, and now I never read a book or care for knowledge. Pulo took hold of me—the sunshine and the ease. You wondered—I saw it in your eyes—that I cared for naught beyond the confines of Pulo. You wondered that I did not pity the lepers, that their fate did not interest me, that I even expected, myself, to sink to their level. I saw the shocked look in your face when I spoke indifferently of what would become of the villagers in the rain and the earthquake. . . . But the reason is simple. I am a savage. And I should have won you to savagery."

"Jewel!" he cried.

"All I have said is true," she persisted.

"Even if it is true, I mean to win *you* to a life which in time you will infinitely prefer to the life of Pulo. Jewel, if we love each other, that's our guarantee for the future. I care

nothing for the artificial barriers between 'civilisation' and 'savagery.' The two are often the same thing. When you are my bride——"

"I shall never be your bride."

"Why do you say that?" A cold fear shot through him.

"White Plume," she said, "do you remember that at first I wanted you to stay: then, when I had gained your love, I said I would not marry you until you had been to Gah-nung? That was partly because, loving you, I wished you to keep your word to Dr. Levaloir. (Before I had gained your love I was selfish and did not care whether you kept your word or broke it.) But it was also partly because I had begun to have a suspicion—I had begun to fear—I wanted to put off time, to make sure."

"To make sure of what?"

"I told you that a day might come when I should *need* the Opal water. I thought that it would be a long time in coming. Instead, White Plume, it has come already."

He gazed at her, aghast.

"The curse is upon me. I learnt this quite suddenly, White Plume, yesterday. You and I had descended to the river. I felt very weak, I did not know why. I rested; you worked

at the sampan. While you were working it occurred to me that my necklace of pearls was not safe; it was hanging down the front of my tunic; I should put it inside. I unfastened the brooch and put the necklace inside the tunic; and I *saw*."

"Yes?"

"Afterwards, in the night, while you slept, I dipped my hand over the side of the sampan into a patch of Opal water, to test——"

She pushed her sleeve up her arm, and held it out for his inspection.

He took her hand in his. Bending over it he scented the faint sweet odour of violets . . . a perfume which would always have poignant memories for him.

Upon the rounded forearm there were delicate pencillings of the finest down; and Kellock saw that the minute hairs which formed this down were bleached and pale.

"You shouldn't have done it, Jewel," he gasped. "I—I don't believe this means anything at all. The Opal water evidently has some qualities we don't understand——"

She was standing, facing him. Her face was grave, the exquisite eyes very tender, the lovely mouth curved in a faint, a pitying smile—as though she grieved for him rather than for herself.

"I can never be your mate, White Plume, my dear, dear White Plume. See, I will show you what I discovered while I waited by the river."

She drew herself up, proud and straight—a queenly yet tragic figure.

"I will show you what no one but myself has seen before." She unfastened the scarab brooch at her throat. The tunic fell back, revealing the firm young breasts, across which hung the rope of pearls. And upon the olive curve of one of the breasts, like a coin, there was a circular patch—white—white as snow.

"Now you have seen, White Plume!"

She stood facing the sun, the sea and sky a background for her gracious, exotic beauty. Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes gazed into unseen distances.

"*This*," she raised one hand and pointed at her bosom, "is why I can never be your mate, White Plume. Soon I shall be as white as the dwellers at the Pleasure-House. I shall become like Zuaila; and you, were you to wed me, would become like Van Duysen or Archer. Only—without the Opal water we should die; without it I *shall* die. . . . White Plume, when I showed you this I bade you farewell."

She had made her renunciation.

With unfaltering fingers she drew together the folds of her tunic and re-fastened them by means of the golden scarab brooch.

And then . . . Kellock had her in his arms.

"Jewel, my Jewel, I won't give you up! I'm going to take you to Gah-nung, and Dr. Levaloir will save you. Perhaps you're wrong; perhaps it isn't—isn't"—he stumbled—"isn't so conclusive as you think. Science is wonderful now, you know. Even if you're right about the Opal water—we've got those two flasks. I'm thankful you made me fetch the second one. The oil must be immensely stronger than the water. Dr. Levaloir will advise us: he'll find a way out. Jewel, you're mine, and I won't let you go!"

She was passive. She let him kiss her. She let him pour out his assurances and his plans for the future. But still, in her gaze, there was only tenderness and pity; and her sole words were:

"I am sorry for my White Plume. Poor White Plume—you are punished for your love of me!"

As though in fitting commentary upon her sadness, a strange breeze moaned past. Little waves began to lap drearily against the sides of the sampan. The light faded.

Kellock, looking up, saw that the horizon

line was like a black wire, strung taut between a grey ocean below and a metallic firmament above. Over the island the smoke pall had swelled, become enormous. It was rolling wildly, buffeted in every direction. For a moment the sun could be discerned behind it—a rayless orb, red and bleared. Then it was blotted out. A great darkness engulfed the world.

A chill wind shrieked across the sea.

He felt Jewel cower before it.

“White Plume!” She clutched him.

“I am here, my dear one. Cling close to me!”

“You will be with me to the end,” he heard her say. “*That* will be happiness for me, my Lord White Plume.”

CHAPTER XVI

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

LOOKING back upon the hours which ensued, Kellock was never able to form, in his own mind, a connected story : all he could recollect was a general impression of confusion, terror, darkness and noise.

The darkness, to be sure, was never complete ; it was irradiated not only by lightning, but also by the fickle fires of the volcano. The mountain group in the centre of the island, from being a congeries of vent-holes, had fused into one crater. This crater, which had been the Happy Valley, was a-brim with lava. Kellock, in the occasional glimpses which he could catch through the storm and spray, beheld amazing overflows of this lava : an incarnadined slime of destruction which percolated down the jungle-clad slopes, not setting fire to the trees—they were too saturated with

dampness to burn—but simply consuming them, in holocausts of steam.

A fresh series of earthquake shocks accompanied this eruption. Their shore effects were invisible at this distance ; but their influence on the sea was only too evident. Each shock could be *felt*, almost as though some submarine monster had delivered a vicious thump on the keel of the sampan; and immediately after each thump the sampan gyrated on an unseen vortex, as though at the ocean's bottom a huge escape-pipe had been unplugged and had set in motion a whirlpool suck of the waters. Down the interior of the whirlpool's glassy cone the sampan shot, dancing ; then the suction ceased as abruptly as it began and for the moment there was peace. Never for long. A hundred times, a thousand times, came the flash from the island, the thump, the giddy vertigo of the whirlpool—and then the breathing-space.

There was also the wind—a wind sometimes icy cold, sometimes hot as though from a furnace—which blew now from one quarter and now from another : a wild, insensate wind which first made the sea choppy and then battered it into a waste of curded foam. The wind seemed to have a spite against the sampan, seemed

determined to capsize it. Kellock, crouching with Jewel for shelter from the spray, could feel the sampan being wrenched as though the gale's fingers strained to tilt it over as he himself had yesterday tilted it on the river-bank to drain ; in the darkness there was the abominable illusion, each time the sampan heeled, that a giant was pushing and twisting it, taking a grip upon the jagged spike of broken wood which marked where the Buddha-head had been. In the boiling fury of the tornado the sampan seemed a toy : its passengers were tiny, microscopic, by contrast with the immensity of the forces in whose midst they were helpless.

The noise was deafening. The whistle of the blizzard, the splashing of the sea, the rumble of the eruption on the island and the clangour of continuous thunder overhead, united in an uproar whose effects stunned the senses already bewildered by the gyrations of the boat. Kellock and Jewel could not hear each other speak ; both were probably too overwhelmed even to think ; they clung together ; a pressure of the hands was their only signal, to show that they were still alive and still cognisant of each other's presence.

How long this torture of the storm lasted, it

was impossible to say. Minutes were like hours, hours like weeks. But the end came at last. What was the cause of the final catastrophe Kellock did not, till afterwards, learn. The boat had almost upset so many times that, when it did upset, the wave which toppled over its gunwale seemed to him to be much as other waves—only a trifle larger. But this was a wave not as other waves: it was, in fact, the stupendous tidal wave which swept that portion of the archipelago at the moment when the island of the Happy Valley finally ceased to exist and was swallowed up in the ocean.

This tidal wave—"A wall of water, not sloping but vertical, and fifty feet high if it was an inch, I give you my blessed word," as Captain Sibthorpe (who saw it from the bridge of the *Orpheus*) afterwards said—treated the sampan perhaps more considerately than it might have treated a larger and less buoyant craft. It merely overturned it and buried its passengers beneath a mountain of liquid which made their drowning a certainty. The tidal wave then hurled itself onward, at the pace of an express train, passed across the site of Pulo, did its utmost to annihilate some two hundred other islands to the northward, and eventually, diminishing in

volume, dispersed itself in cyclones which were considered severe in places as far off as Luzon, Bangkok, and even the remote fairylands of Melanesia and Polynesia. Crops were ruined, fishing-nets lost, homes given over to starvation here and there over half a hemisphere, because the Happy Valley had gone down, a cauldron of boiling lava, into the ocean-bed from which it had originated, and the seas and the winds had rushed in to fill the vacuum.

Of this at the time Kellock knew nothing. All he knew was that he and Jewel were drowning—and he was determined that, if they drowned, they should drown together. In that supreme moment they were as one : her body, gripped in his arms, was pressed to his as in a vice ; all his long-garnered strength was concentrated on the sole fixed idea, "*I must not let her go.*" The myriad cross-currents of the undersea confusion prized at his arms like levers to wrench them asunder, the weight of water strangled him so that his lungs were bursting, hideous forces dragged him downward when he tried to struggle surfacewards. An eternity passed. He *must* breathe, he *must* breathe. His mouth opened, and filled with water. He choked, choked—writhed in agony. Feebly, more feebly, his limbs moved, still with

vain instinct trying to push him onwards, through these vile depths, to the air. He *must* breathe, he *must*——

His struggles slackened. Lights danced before his eyes. He was failing, failing. Now came strange dreams, dreams of the world's beauty, dreams of the past, dreams of . . . Jewel.

He and she were standing together in the marble courtyard beneath the sunshine, and she was smiling at him. Oh, enchantment of that smile, enchantment of her glorious eyes, enchantment of her tall figure, straight and flexible as a young sapling, delicate in its comeliness, lyric in its grace and in the olive beauty of its limbs! . . .

Jewel!

Unconsciousness overwhelmed him; his dreams dispersed; his mind became a blank.

But he still held her to his breast, in a grip of iron.

* * * * *

And then he knew that he had kissed her, and that her unresponsive lips tasted saltly: they were wet with brine.

Considering this phase of his dream he became aware that he was no longer dreaming; that he was breathing, and, with vague efforts, was

supporting himself and his burden in the waves. He opened his eyes. Daylight ! Greyish daylight—but still, daylight. The smoke pall was driven away before the gale, leaving only a heaven of angry, scudding rack.

God, how weary he was !

What a night it had been . . . mountains of water beating him down . . . and something *dragging* at him, too. . . .

The leaden flasks of Opal oil !

Of course : *they* had been the weight which, so frenziedly, had seemed to tug at him : he could still feel them, one in his knapsack, the other in his jacket pocket : small things, but abominably heavy. It was their leaden dead-weight which had nearly made all the difference, nearly drowned him and Jewel also. . . .

Jewel : where was Jewel ?

In his arms, of course : he had just kissed her.

A salt kiss. . . .

With a sudden effort of concentration he pulled himself together. . . .

Yes, Jewel was in his arms, an inert body, with flaccid limbs, turning a numb face upwards towards him. Her eyes were closed.

He and she, when they had enjoyed that diving-match of theirs in the Pulo bath, had

learnt that her power of remaining beneath water was less than his. . . .

He gazed at her now and knew. . . .

Jewel . . . his betrothed . . . the woman of perfect beauty . . . girl and queen in one . . . Jewel was dead.

CHAPTER XVII

FREE AND UNAFRAID

"IF I hadn't sighted that there sampan, bottom-upwards, I should never have thought to steer any nearer," said Captain Sibthorpe. "Miles and miles away it was from where the island had been. The sea wasn't running so high, neither. So I reckoned as how I'd have a last look around before I sheered off and shaped a course for Gah-nung. And after a bit of cruising up and down, there you *were*."

"Exactly. There I was." Kellock, reclining on the poop in pyjamas (his duck suit had been taken over by the steward to be washed and dried and ironed in the galley) listened without any great interest to the Captain's narrative.

"I could hardly believe my eyes, Mr. Kellock. The island itself had gone—bust—wallop: naturally I thought that was the end of everybody on it. Then there was the hurricane, and the tidal wave. Even the old *Orpheus* got a

bit of a knocking about, I can tell you. And yet, *there you were*, floating in the trough of the sea. . . .

"We lowered a boat. I steered her myself. When we came nearer we saw as how you was hardly conscious."

"I wasn't. I don't remember being taken aboard, Captain."

"But now what I'm curious about is this," pursued Captain Sibthorpe. "I could have sworn you were supporting another man. Just as we came up, he slipped from your arms, and sank. To sink like that, he must have been dead, drowned hours before. How you managed to keep him up I don't know. It was a rare marvel that you had saved yourself, let alone tried to save another chap. . . . Queer you don't remember anything now. I suppose it was one of the niggers who had rowed you down the river."

"I expect that was it." Kellock sighed. "I expect that was it."

He remembered quite clearly how Jewel's body, heavy as a stone, had slid from his grasp and gone down, down, down to its tomb in the depths.

And with it had gone a dream. . . .

With a grief-dulled heart he looked back

across the vistas of that halcyon adventure and began to estimate it in its true perspective.

A dream—yes, even its most solid realities had truly the characteristics of a dream: their fairest promises had been but an illusion. A lure and an illusion! He had been tempted at the very moment when he had felt most boastfully free and unafraid. And he had been false to his motto.

He saw it all now.

Jewel's dead form, descending through fathomless abysses of ocean, symbolised the disappearance of his dream—and his return to reality, to the cruelty and nobleness of facts, to the struggle for existence, to the clean and clear-eyed life of courageous adventure and austere conflict with circumstance.

He had nearly become a slave.

Now, albeit grief-stricken, he might in humbleness become, once more, a Man.

Figuring out, as best he might, some philosophy wherewith to face the future, he hit upon a refrain which formed part of one of the very few minor-key poems in his collection. One of the verses already shaped itself:

"How swift the vision fades!
Realities are made of sterner stuff,
Dreams once, but dreams come true;

The making them come true is Life enough. . . .
Down sleep's long avenue
The golden ghosts of fantasy may stream
And vanish in the glades :
I wake, and when it can be but a dream,
How swift the vision fades !"

Which reflections, of course, he did not impart to the wholly materialistic Captain Sibthorpe. That good friend, with kindliness beaming from his plump and unshorn countenance, was perhaps a little disconcerted at his passenger's lack of communicativeness. But Kellock, he evidently concluded, was still weak from his ordeal in the waves, and must not be pressed to talk. The Captain, for all his outward grossness, could be tactful : he knew when to hold his peace. And something in the young American, with his blue eyes and muscular frame, appealed to the shrewd old British skipper. He had grown fond of Kellock, and Kellock had reciprocally grown fond of him. The two, in silence rather than in speech, had come to trust each other : masculine spirits, each.

So Kellock—though, as the days passed, he launched on some generalised descriptions of the island—told the Captain nothing about Jewel. *That* history should be locked for ever in his heart, *his* treasure and *his* sad memory : no one

should share it. The Captain might wonder whose was the figure which his arms had clasped in that storm-racked ocean . . . "a nigger," of course . . . So let it be!

Nor was Dr. Levaloir told.

When Kellock presented himself in Gah-nung, trimly attired as heretofore, save for a borrowed cap (his helmet was afloat, sailing the archipelago he knew not whither), the doctor stared.

"You!" he gasped.

"I have fetched the object for which you sent me——"

"A cruiser brought news that Pulo had been engulfed by an earthquake . . . I never expected to see you again, Mr. Kellock."

"Here I am, anyhow."

"The flask—you've brought the flask?"

"I have."

"You have kept your promise!" The doctor spoke with profound emotion. "Mr. Kellock, I ask the honour of shaking hands with you."

They shook hands—the young American a trifle shamefacedly. If Dr. Levaloir only knew——! His withered little hand trembled in Kellock's rather touchingly.

"Come." He led the way into the laboratory, shutting its door upon the throng of sick folk

who, as of yore, awaited the ministrations of the Healer of Sorrows.

"It is impossible," he said, "to offer you an adequate reward."

"I don't want any reward."

"The so-called sacred oil is not merely essential to my experiments, it is enormously valuable in itself: it has an actual money value, I mean. This last flask may perhaps suffice to complete the investigations I have in hand. When I heard that the island had been swallowed up I thought that a lifetime's work was lost; I despaired. To you, Mr. Kellock, the world owes an inconceivable debt."

"What is this sacred oil, anyway?" Kellock had unfastened his knapsack and produced from it the leaden flask. "You know, Doctor, I saw a good deal at Pulo that was mighty mystifying—the lepers, the Opal water baths, the temple, the old palaces. Apparently the baths have—I should say *had*, for they're gone now—what superstitious people would call miraculous powers."

"But we are not superstitious, and this is not an age of miracles," assented Dr. Levaloir. "Just so. The ancient civilisation which established itself in Pulo, and which hedged itself about with all kinds of priestly absurdities,

merely anticipated a twentieth-century discovery. I myself, when I chanced to make a friend of the Sultan of Pulo, and bargained with him for a regular supply of the Pulo sacred oil, did not know what it was: I had only heard legends of its virtues. When I analysed it and found what it contained, Mr. Kellock, I had to fight a moment of temptation; for I *might* have settled down as a rich man and lived in luxury for the rest of my life. Then I thought of the good I could do; and, well, the rest you know."

"What did it contain?"

"Radium," said the doctor.

He paused. "Radium," he repeated. "This flask is probably worth, at market rates, some millions of dollars. The Opal baths of which you speak—and which a person like myself simply dare not approach: their effect on the brain tissues might be deadly—evidently contain, if not radium, at any rate radio-active compounds of great intensity. But in the oil, distilled by the priests, radium itself is present—radium, the most precious element on the face of the globe. I don't say that those priests forestalled Madame Curie; but certainly centuries ago the properties of radium had been discovered—if utterly misapplied—by the un-

known sybarites who built the palaces in the Happy Valley.

"Radio-active springs occur elsewhere, in Europe as well as Asia, but the Pulo ones were unique. Some mysterious mineral putrefaction must have been going on in the bowels of that volcanic mountain, and the Opal waters were—were the 'matter,' so to speak, the *pus* of that subterranean wound. To the ancients its effects were magic. Chemists have taught us otherwise . . . Yet who shall say what is magic and what is not?"

Kellock was thoughtful. "This last flask will carry you through your labours?"

"I think so."

"Sure?—because, as a matter of fact, it isn't the last. I brought another." And he drew the second flask from his pocket and placed it on the table.

"Another flask!" Dr. Levaloir seemed unable to believe his eyes. "And you're offering it to me?"

"Certainly. It nearly cost me my life. Perhaps it will save others' lives."

"The first flask, by the terms of our agreement, belongs to me, Mr. Kellock. This one is yours. You are a young man; your career is before you, and you could do much with money.

Take this flask to Europe or America and sell it—I will give you the names of buyers—and you will be wealthy for life. I would buy it myself, but I do not own a thousandth part of its fair price.”

“It is yours.” Kellock could afford to smile at the prospects of wealth which Dr. Levaloir held out to him. *That* temptation was no temptation now, after the lesson he had learnt.

“You mean it, Mr. Kellock?”

“I mean it. Money is no use to me. Besides, this second flask is not mine. It belonged to someone . . . who is dead : a woman. I give it to you as a memorial of her, that in her death she may bring life to others.”

Dr. Levaloir was silent for a space. “There is a woman in the life of nearly every man, Mr. Kellock,” he said quietly, “and—were you to probe men’s hearts—it is generally a woman who is dead. A parable ! Perhaps you are too young to understand it.

“When I chose you to go to Pulo I knew, of course, that you were unmarried ; your clear eyes told me more than that : they told me that you were celibate. There is no change in them now. Mr. Kellock, the world lies before you ; some day you will find a fit helpmate amongst your own peoples, and you will be glad that no

mirage of false love, no snare of passion, caught your feet as they walked through the beautiful East.

"The East is full of sorrows. . . .

"I take this second flask of sacred oil, Mr. Kellock. To you it is a memorial of the woman of whom you spoke ; to me it is the gift from a Westerner for the East."

They talked for a while, the doctor telling of his plans and again and again pouring forth his gratitude to the young American and urging on him the acceptance of some reward. Surely he needed, at the very least, some ready cash ?—and the doctor produced, and pressed upon him, a leather bag of gold pieces.

Kellock shook his head. But at last, when he rose to go, he said :

"Well, I'll take a couple of these after all ;" and he picked up two of the gold pieces, which had rolled from the bag's mouth, and put them in his pocket. "I need some clothes—more particularly a new hat in place of this cap, which Sibthorpe has had to lend me. I'm going with the *Orpheus* to Yokohama : the ship's accounts are in a muddle and I'm to put them straight for Captain Sibthorpe on the voyage. It is a comfortable method of working my passage.

Japan is on the way to America. I have a fancy to see my native country again."

And he bade the doctor farewell.

As he issued forth into the thronged courtyard and passed through the piteous infirm people to whom the Opal oil might bring life, he felt that his adventure—nay, even the pain at his heart for the loss of Jewel—had not been in vain.

"*The East is full of sorrows.*" The phrase recurred to him, with melancholy significance.

At the gate, in the full glare of the sunshine—for there was no room left in the crowded shadow of the courtyard—a woman cowered, waiting for the doctor. There was a baby in her arms.

Something in her pose, something in the carriage of her head or the curve of her dark-skinned arm, reminded Kellock of Jewel.

He halted, and looked at her.

The face which she turned up to him was not like Jewel's. It was young—the face of a mere girl—but it was not beautiful. The eyes were large and haunting, their expression terrible in its anguish and anxiety.

Silently she removed the poor rag which covered her baby.

And Kellock, looking down on the little creature, recognised its fell disease : recognised, too, that it was a white man's child.

He might have had just such a child as that.

Kellock fumbled in his pocket, and with a muttered word slipped into the woman's hand his two gold pieces.

Then he walked forth into the city of Gah-nung.

And as he strode down its tortuous streets towards the harbour he felt that a burden had been lifted from his soul. His clear eyes faced the world unflinchingly.

"I am Free," he affirmed, "and I am Unafraid."

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